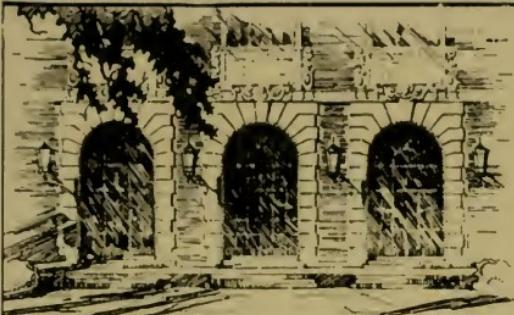


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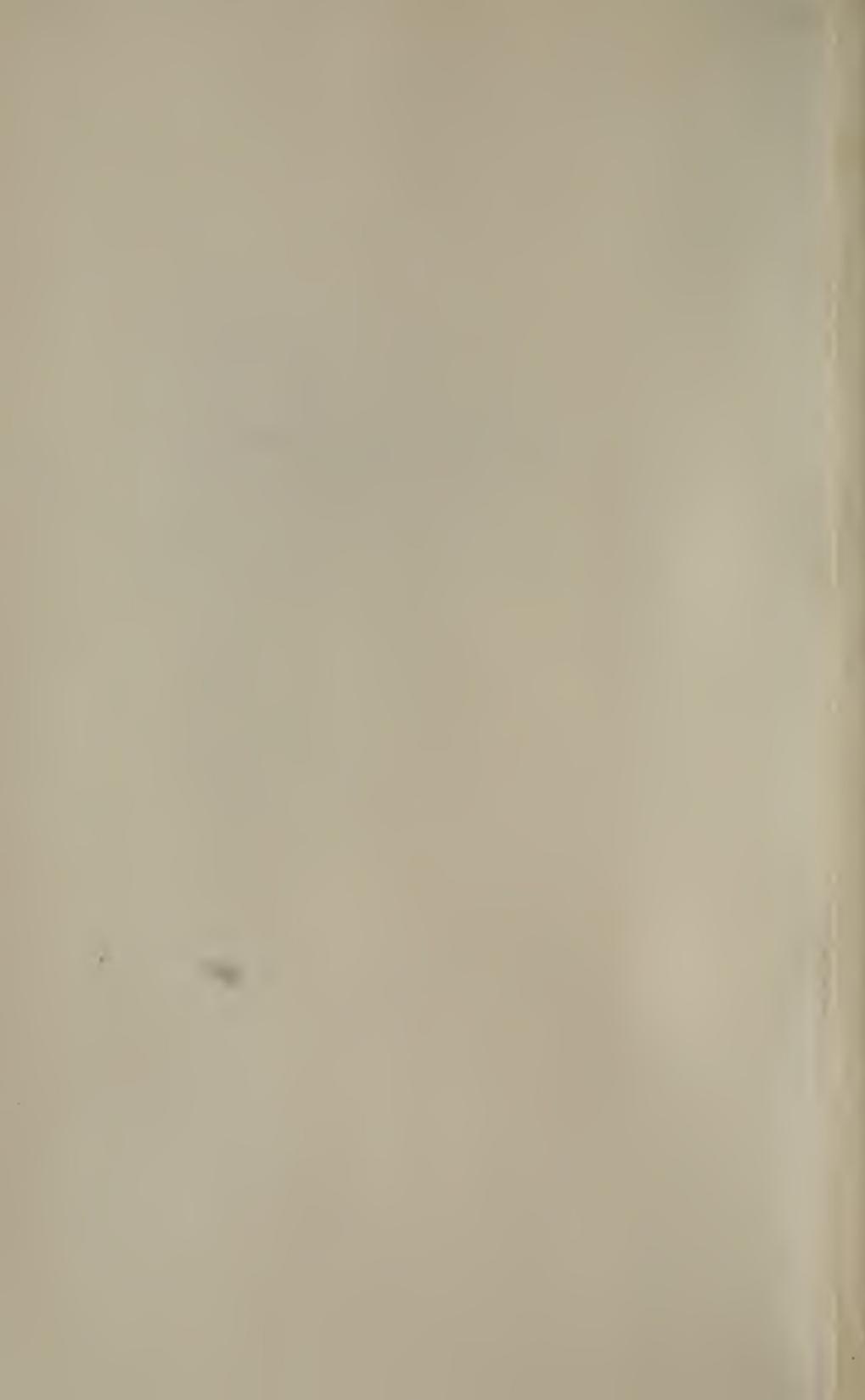
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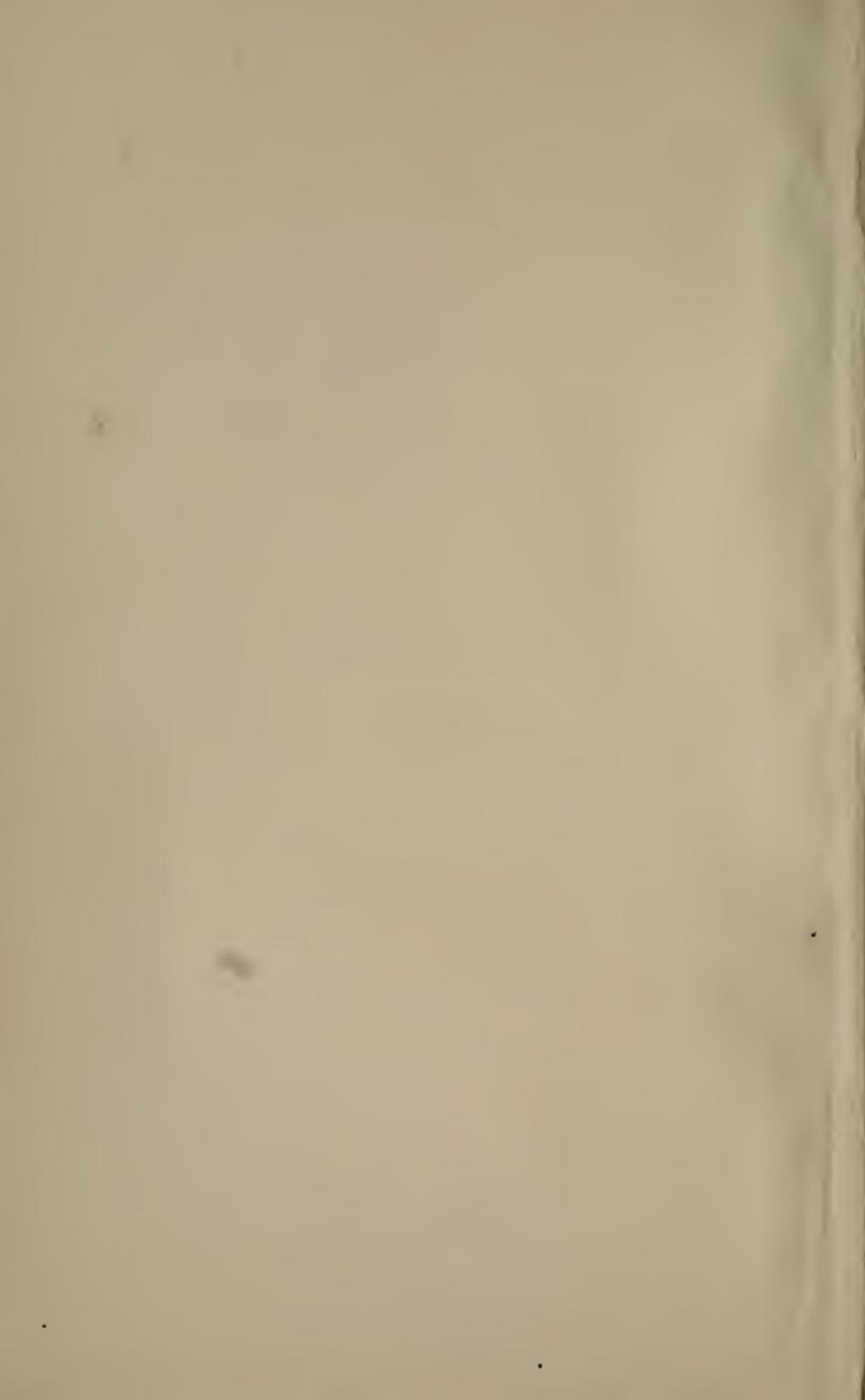
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B R I D G E T.

VOL. II.



B R I D G E T.

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

“KITTY,” “DOCTOR JACOB,” “FELICIA,”
“A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,”
&c., &c.

“Aux plus desherités, le plus d’amour.”
Guépin, of Nantes.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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B R I D G E T.

CHAPTER I.

THE ADDER'S STING.

THE autumn was an untarnished glory at Beechholme Park. No vaporous veil there to rob the landscape of half its brightness, no daily vexations to spoil the enjoyment of daily splendour! Helwyse, though anxious about Bryan's affairs, was well content that her work compelled her to stay in Surrey a little longer. She had altered one of her frescoes at the last moment, had put

her theme, in fact, in a minor key, so there was nothing left to do but change the others also. In the meantime, Mr. Cornwall's sportsman guests had come and gone. Host and hostess now spent half the week in town, often only returning to Beechholme from Saturday till Monday, thus leaving the house to Helwyse and the children. Such solitude had charms for the dreaming, aspiring, ambitious girl-artist. When tired of work, she could put on hat and cloak and wander for hours through the mellowing woods, over gorse-scented sweeps, or in and out the bosky dells of the park. Sometimes she drove with the little girls far beyond all these, reaching the blue hills that had bounded their horizon below, looking down upon new, wide, invigorating prospects; or they slowly ascended the solitary road leading to the wild dreary

gorge of Hindhead, leaving the red and yellow woods, the glowing pastures, the snug farmsteads behind, finding themselves shut in by the weird, sunburnt, rocky hills, bare of tree or human habitation. The wind-tossed clouds, showing the clear purple sky between the rents, dropped no purple shadows now, the sun came out fitfully and seldom, and already the weather was brisk and cold. In the heart of the woods no birds were singing, all the singing was left to the robins, those modest and indefatigable little minstrels who, when the grand woodland orchestra is silent, keep wayside hedges gay with perpetual roundelay. May they not, in fact, be compared to the humbler human vocalists, delighting lovers of simple music with cheap little concerts, when opera-houses are shut up and world-renowned contraltos and tenors are starring

it in foreign parts? As yet, the dreary wail of autumn winds through the pine boughs—requiem of the dying year—had not begun, and Nature still wore a smiling countenance.

To Helwyse, the quietude and uneventfulness of such a life, a life divided between her own thoughts and country enjoyments, were inexpressibly refreshing. She foresaw that the existence to which she was returning would be more difficult than that of former days. Bryan's cares were her cares, and over and above undertaking the sole charge of Ambroise, she was determined to do something for Brigitte also, if Brigitte would let her. The girl had poured out the story of Papillon's proposals to her aunt, and Helwyse, though unable to offer the gentlest reproof under the circumstances, could but doubly feel the difficulty of helping Bryan,

as far as she was concerned. Helwyse shared in common with Emilia that eminently feminine insight into little things which is so valuable an ingredient in domestic life; but in her case, it was subservient to a large way of looking at results, without which the former may degenerate into a mere blindness to everything not little. She saw how difficult it would be to solve the problem about Brigitte whilst Emilia and Bryan were of opposite opinions, another reason for helping them to the utmost of her ability.

When Helwyse was not thinking of her work or of Bryan, she found herself often thinking of Mr. Kingsbury. She wondered if they should meet in London as often as usual, and if that parting coldness of his meant nothing after all. But, on the whole, this autumn interlude between her Italian

travel and her return to work was pleasant enough, and she felt in no hurry to have it over.

Freeland was busy at Beechholme Park also, and the two met frequently, sometimes to consult each other about their work, sometimes to talk of future plans for Ambroise, sometimes by mere accident, and this was the kind of meeting he loved best of all. He could see, and Helwyse would have acknowledged it too, had she ever questioned herself on the matter, that she always regarded him as an equal when they were together. In what respect, indeed, except so far as externals went, was he not the equal of anyone at Beechholme Park? But this was not his own reflection—rather hers—when she had sometimes playfully compared him with some of Mr. Cornwell's rich friends, especi-

ally the men who came to drink his old port wine and shoot his pheasants. What a relief when they had gone! What an added mental height they lent to the so-called workman, whom, by force of habit, his good-natured employers were compelled to regard as a social inferior—as kitchen company, in fact. Helwyse often compensated Freeland for the isolation to which this moral and intellectual superiority condemned him; but just at the present time his position at Beechholme Park was far from unpleasant. The servants were mostly in town; and as the visitors had departed also, he was left to pursue his task uninterrupted and alone.

And, of course, he was constantly seeing Helwyse, sometimes for a moment, not unfrequently for an hour. So his lucky—or unlucky—stars willed it!

For instance, Helwyse was playing alone in the drawing-room one day, when he was absolutely obliged to interrupt her. He had come to an end of a certain colour, and he knew that Helwyse possessed it in abundance. What so natural as to go and ask for the paint, especially as he should lose a good deal of time by being obliged to leave off?—and Helwyse knew the value of time as well as he. Helwyse was no musician, in the technical sense of the word, but she could play some things with considerable sweetness and expression, and Freeland, listening to her rendering of a favourite sonata by Mozart now, thought the performance wonderful. When she had reached the end, and turned to look for another music-book, what was her astonishment to find him in the doorway!

“Pray excuse me for playing the listener,” he said; “but I am very fond of

music, and the temptation was too strong. I came really to ask for some cobalt, as my stock has run out."

"Certainly. I will fetch it," Helwyse answered, still turning over the pile of music-books. "But I had no idea you cared for music. Why did you not say so before, and I would often have played to you?"

"Will you play to me now, then? This is what I want to hear," he added, selecting a sonata of Haydn. "I learnt it as a boy, and have always loved it since."

"I am very fond of it too. It reminds me of a bunch of violets and primroses. Why did you give up your music?"

"I had no time and no money for music in those days, Miss Helwyse. But though I cannot play myself, I still enjoy it as much as anyone. I always treat myself to one or two concerts during the winter."

“That is very little.”

“It is better than nothing, and I hear good music at a friend’s house very often. He is a German, a working watchmaker, and his sister plays very well indeed.”

Helwyse, woman-like, at once began building up a little romance out of this speech. Freeland was, of course, in love with the young musician, and could not do better than marry her, if she was good and pretty, as well as clever. She felt very inquisitive, and could not resist making a few inquiries.

“I am glad you have such pleasant friends,” she said, carelessly. “What is the young lady’s name?—where does she live?”

He burst into a merry laugh.

“Oh! Miss Helwyse, how you jump at conclusions! She is the mother of a large

family, and must be at least fifty years old."

Helwyse laughed too. She did not know it, but she felt a secret satisfaction in the fact Freeland had just communicated to her. Is it not always so? Are not all women, the sweetest and wisest, as well as the rest, downright coquettes at heart?

Then she played to him, first the selected sonata, then selections from the divine Beethoven, Schubert, and others. He praised her playing, adding some criticisms that showed her how thorough, as far as it went, was his knowledge of music. Even Papillon, a born musician, who, moreover, had devoted entire years to the study, could not have shown more natural appreciation and real insight.

"How did you find time to learn all this?" she asked, after he had analysed a

passage, pointing out the consummate taste and learning displayed in it. "I am always finding out that you know more than other people."

Again he laughed, that frank, merry, boyish laugh which made him such a favourite with young and old.

"What a satire! But it is astonishing, as a rule, how much less people know than they might do. I speak now of that kind of knowledge which lies quite outside their immediate callings. Many men seem to think that it would be an impertinence on their part to learn anything they cannot make capital out of—any kind of capital, I mean—whilst it is just that they want to prevent them from being mere machines—often intellectual machines, too."

"Quite true. I am sadly ignorant myself. I never fancy that I have time for anything, except for painting. But I in-

tend reading some useful books this winter with Ambroise," Helwyse said, very meekly. "Will you lend me an English History?"

"With pleasure, or any other books you like, of course."

"Well, I should say I ought to read a little ancient mythology. I know nothing about the Greek gods and goddesses. And Milton's 'Paradise Lost'—that is a book I have always wished to read."

"You shall have it, Miss Helwyse, and a book about the Greek gods and goddesses too," he answered smiling. How her ingenuousness captivated him! "But," he added, suddenly recollecting his work, "I am sorry to trouble you again about the cobalt. I fear I must ask you to give it to me now."

It was characteristic of Freeland that he

never seemed tempted into those small derelictions from duty which most of us so readily excuse either in ourselves or others. He liked nothing so well in the world as a little friendly talk with Helwyse, and he knew that she would be leaving Beechholme in a day or two. But it never occurred to him that, because she had kindly played to him for half an hour, and because, if he had asked her, she would doubtless have played on for another half hour, these were reasons for accepting, much less asking, more. He respected his friends and employers, but he respected himself most of all, and did not for an instant lose sight of the fact, moreover, that it was by reason of such ever-vigilant self-denial on his part that his relations with Helwyse were on the present easy footing.

“Will you not like to hear this little Impromptu of Schubert’s?” she asked.

"Another day, thank you. I have no time now," he answered, and then she fetched him the cobalt, and he returned to his occupation.

The day had been fixed for Helwyse to return; her boxes were packed, and the final preparation for departure made, when an unexpected incident brought about that delay so mysterious to the little household at Hornsey Rise.

She had even put aside her easel and palette, determined to spend the last lovely day among these Surrey woods out of doors, taking an early train next morning for London. Of late the weather had been clear and cold, but as if in sympathy with the young artist's fancy, to-day a warm golden mist bathed hill and valley, and a soft fragrance of ripening fruit and fading flowers was wafted from cottage-gardens. The splendid dahlias and chrysanthemums

at Beechholme Park were scentless, and you had to get beyond the boundaries of the park to find the real glories of this autumn day—trailing masses of lustrous blackberries, clusters of bright blue sloe shining amid yellow leaves, clouds of coral-pink spindleberry flushing river banks, and the crimson fruit of the Cumberland apple brightest of all amid the reddening maple-woods.

Helwyse loved these things with the passion of a country-bred girl, an Irish country-bred girl, moreover, who, in her toddling days, had tripped barefoot over the lea and gathered wild flowers on the broad hills of her native land, having all her joy and all her life out of doors.

So, feeling very happy, she knew not why, unless it was that such a holiday on the hills reminded her of her dear Ireland, she tripped along, singing as she went, the

brightest thing amid all that morning's brightness. By the time she had walked a mile, her basket was filled with woodland treasures : garlands of purple-leaved bryony and Traveller's joy, sprays of ladyfern, wild honeysuckle, tufts of velvety moss and golden saxifrage.

She did not know where she was going —nothing is easier than to lose your way in these Surrey woods—and after a long ramble, all on a sudden found herself within a stone's throw of Hollow Farm, which she had reached by a new and undiscovered path. “Mr. Freeland will not be there,” she said to herself, “but I will go indoors and rest a little while,” and as no one answered her knock she opened the door, entered the little parlour, and putting down her basket, took a chair by the window. By-and-by she saw him coming along the road, and heard a clatter of plates and

dishes in the kitchen. "Of course he is returning to his early dinner," she thought, "I will not stay any longer, as it might appear an intrusion"—so taking up her basket, she hastened out of doors to meet him.

"Pray forgive me for the liberty I have taken," she said. "I was a little tired, and finding no one about, I walked straight in and sat down."

"You were most welcome," he answered. "Would you like a chair in the garden?"

"No, thank you. I must be getting home to our early dinner. Which is my nearest way?"

He turned back to put her in the right path, and as his own meal was not yet ready, and that day he had plenty of time before him, accompanied her, without thinking of the distance. Nothing could

surpass the quiet joy and deliciousness of that balmy, golden autumn noon. As they crossed a little birchen wood, the wrens and robins were singing blithely, the sunbeams lay lovingly across their way, daisies still pranked the mossy carpet under their feet, and the wide blue landscape around, hill and down and sloping valley, slept in tender gold.

They walked side by side, Freeland carrying her basket of wild flowers and berries, neither much disposed to talk. On a sudden, Helwyse caught his arm and clung to him with a cry of pain and terror. Unknowingly, she had trodden upon an adder, which had stung her in the ankle, causing acute pain. Freeland sprang forward, and still holding Helwyse with one arm, with the other raised his stick, and, not very easily, dispatched the retreating

foe. When, at last, it was really dead, he turned to her full of concern.

"Oh! Miss Helwyse, I am sure you are suffering very much. Lean on me, and we will get back to the farm as quickly as we can, where I will apply some ammonia. Take my stick."

She was very pale, and no wonder, what with the pain and the fright, but tried bravely to do as he bid her. Leaning on the stick and on that strong arm, she managed to accomplish a yard or two; then he saw that she had come to the limit of her forces. The sweet eyes filled with tears, the lips trembled, he feared a fainting-fit.

"Come," he said, cheerfully, "this is the best way—don't be afraid."

Then, easily as if she had been a baby, he took her up in his arms, and with long

strides made the best of his way to the farm. Freeland blessed his lucky stars then that he had strengthened that strong frame of his by all kinds of manly exercises in a gymnasium of his own founding. It was not the weight of his sweet burden, but the roughness of the road, that made his task a difficult one, even to a trained athlete like himself, for so we may fairly call him. What is the superiority of high-born races, he used to say to his fellow-workmen, but often a mere physical superiority? Whilst we working men weaken and degrade our bodies by drink, low tastes, and sensual gratifications, the so-called upper ranks elevate, strengthen, and develope theirs by out-of-door life, and all kinds of healthful sports. We cannot have beautiful souls in poor dwarfed and ill-used bodies. Thus he preached to them, and now

he was reaping the benefit of that unremitting desire for physical superiority which he was always inculcating in others.

When at last the farm was reached, and he had laid Helwyse on the sofa of the little parlour, there were a dozen things to think of at once. In the first place, as to remedies. He knew that in a farmhouse there were sure to be two things—namely, a tub of salt brine for ham-pickling in the cellar, and a heap of ammonia for manuring in the yard. Quick as lightning he fetched both, sent to Beechholme Park for the pony-carriage, to the village for the doctor, and administered to his patient a glass of wine. “ You are better now, are you not ? ” he said, when he had done all this. “ The bite was slight, and though it is of course very painful at first, I assure you there is no need to be alarmed.”

"How good you are!" Helwyse said, able to smile now. "The pain is much less, thank you. Won't you eat your dinner?"

"We will wait a little. Ah! there's the boy with the doctor. I told him to drive as fast as he could."

The doctor, however, found very little for him to do, and after assuring Helwyse that she would be quite well in a few days, and, promising to see her next morning, went away. Freeland sat down beside his patient, less anxious for the pony-carriage than he had been for the doctor.

"Could you eat something, Miss Helwyse?" he said, after a time. "It is long past your luncheon hour, and you have been walking all the morning."

"Yes, I think I could," she answered, almost herself again. "What will you give me?"

He went into the kitchen, and in a few minutes returned with a little tray, containing exactly the meal an invalid needed —a new-laid egg, cooked by his own hands, a little fresh butter, temptingly arranged with parsley, a glass saucer containing home-made jam, a jug of cream, and that was all.

“ You must let me give you another glass of wine,” he said, as he stood by the sofa, waiting upon her; and, to please him, she drank it; then the pony-carriage drove up, and he helped her in, placing a cushion for her feet, a pillow for her head, wrapping her tenderly, for fear of cold.

Just as the driver—a mere lad, who helped in the stables, all the servants being in town—mounted the seat, the pony began to prance and rear. It was a mettlesome little favourite of Mrs. Cornwell’s, and

only his mistress was said to be able to manage him.

“ Will you go home with me ? ” Helwyse asked, looking still pale, adding, as soon as he had taken the seat by her side, “ I am sure no harm will happen to me if you take the reins.”

The words were very sweet to listen to, yet how little they meant, he thought, as an hour later he was painting away in the boudoir ! Why was he so foolish as to dwell upon them ? He had merely rendered a friendly service, and she had merely rendered friendly thanks. Surely here was scant reason for the elation that had suddenly taken possession of him.

After an hour or two, both spirits and zeal in his work flagged, and he suddenly recollected that he had forgotten his din-

ner! It was now past four o'clock, just nine hours since his early cup of coffee, and the light would permit him to go on with his work for an hour or two longer! He was on the point of finding his way to the kitchen, to ask for a glass of ale and a bit of bread and cheese, when he encountered Helwyse, limping towards the staircase.

"You here, Mr. Freeland! I thought you had gone straight home. Oh! I am so sorry, for I am sure you have eaten nothing. What *must* you think of me!"

"To tell you the plain truth, I forgot all about it," he said, colouring and laughing. "You know it is my own fault if I starve in this house."

She looked amazed, not in the least understanding the slight blush that accompanied this confession. Then she went upstairs to make tea in the nursery for

Rosie and Janie, and Freeland betook himself to the kitchen, to ask for his glass of beer and bread and cheese.

CHAPTER II.

FREELAND HEARS FROM HELWYSE.

THUS it came about that Helwyse stayed on at Beechholme Park, and when at last the day of departure really came, Freeland felt like a man about to lose the very sun out of his life. They would meet again and again, as soon as he got back to town, there were a thousand things to bring them together now, where before there had been but one; yet he clutched at the last hour of that long-protracted happiness greedily, passionately, childishly, holding on to it as if by this tenacity he should keep it for ever. Do we not all act in the

same way? We have but a day, an hour, five minutes of the beloved one's presence left, yet how interminable they seem, how long and exquisite they are, how insupportable the wrench of parting when it comes!

"We shall soon meet again," Helwyse said blithely, for to her such a parting meant nothing to take to heart. "I suppose you will be back in three or four weeks?"

He hardly heard what she said, and imagining him pre-occupied with her luggage, did not repeat the question. Only one or two women servants were left at Beechholme Park, besides the gardener and grooms, and when Freeland had proposed to see her off, she had gladly accepted the service. So he took her ticket, looked after her boxes, and, when the train came up, carefully helped her in.

Freeland found Beechholme Park a dreary place after Helwyse had gone; and

as if out of sympathy with his feelings, the sombreness of autumn came on a sudden. The burnished splendour of the crimson and purple woods was transformed in a day to a cold brown monotone, the brilliant changeful sky to a perpetual dull grey cloud, the wayside hedges were bare, flowerless, scentless. Black as night were the pine-tops now, through which the wind sighed and soughed perpetually, “the wine-red woods where song no more delights” were silent, sodden, almost impenetrable, whilst all the bare, wide, wind-swept hills were clothed in the russet of faded gorse.

Only the robins kept up their cheerfulness, and many a time when he went to his work, or took long walks on Sundays across hill and dale, their cheerful little duets inspirited him too. Wherever you went, you found these blithe songsters singing to each other from their station on the hawthorn-trees,

their red breasts red as the ripened berry
breaking the melancholy of the scene.

Then came days of perpetual rain, when not even the joyousness of the robin's song consoled him, when his sole refuge from vain thoughts, and what he felt were vain longings, was his work and his books. It must not be thought, however, that he ever indulged in useless regrets or aspirations. He wanted, like all of us, to be happy, and happiness to him meant Helwyse, and Helwyse only. He never for a moment allowed this under-current of inner life and thought to interfere with his work and his duty. In his weakest moments he ever remained master of himself.

Just as his work was finished, and he had fixed the hour for his return to London, he received the following letter from Papillon, bearing an Italian postmark :—

“ DEAR FREELAND,

“ I am sure you will forgive the apparent impertinence of this letter, which I should not write only that I am really very much in earnest. I know I have the unfortunate reputation of being a trifler, but it is, perhaps, often the trifler, rather than the serious man, who has time to concern himself about his friend’s affairs. I have nothing to do, all the more reason why I should intermeddle judiciously with other people’s business.

“ I do very much want you to follow my advice, and, to put the matter in worldly, nay, vulgar language, make a gentleman of yourself. Why should you not? Your antecedents are such as no one need be ashamed of. You have no relations, and what is more important still, no relationships (I know that I am right here) to drag you down. You have acquirements and .

accomplishments that would help to lift you up, and last, but not least, you are blessed with an uncommon share of good looks and good manners.

“I speak, of course, out of pure friendliness when I say, then make a gentleman of yourself; and, in thinking over the matter, I see no difficulties that could not be overcome, unless your own pride stands in the way. Follow my advice. Accept my help. You have nothing else to do, nothing else in the world, I assure you, but trust in me, and in a very short time you will find yourself, not in the subordinate position you now occupy, but in that any high-spirited, well-educated man must prefer—namely, one, permitting association, on equal terms, with well-bred men and women. Ah! there is the knotty point. Think of it well. How can you, whilst you wear the apron

and have *Mr. Freeland, Carver, Gilder, and Artistic Decorator*, painted on your door, aspire to the hand of a lady? I presume, of course, that, like all the rest of us, you mean to marry some day. I am only waiting to do the same, till I find a woman, not good enough for me—that would sound vanity and presumption—but good enough for my ideals. How can you, I repeat, being what you are, socially, dream of marrying a lady? How can you, being what you are, intellectually, dream of marrying a servant girl? My good fellow, the thing is impossible. You are, in many respects, the most sensitive, fastidious, outrageously squeamish person I know. You would shrink from things which do not shock a man of the world, well, I may say, ordinary men; you would shrink from love that did not mean an ideal domestic life; in fact, to put my meaning into homely

English, you only care for one woman, and that is the woman you want to marry !

“ There ! I have blurted out the secret, but you have my word of honour that I would be torn to pieces with red-hot pincers rather than breathe a suspicion of it to anyone but yourself. I am, as you know, a writer of novels, and, therefore, a close observer of human character. I cannot help it, if I find out sooner than other people when my neighbours are in love or when they are not. I do not pry. I am not inquisitive, but I see what is going on around me by force of habit, and this is how it came about that, when at Beechholme Park, I found out your devotion to the fair young artist with the sweet Saxon name which is music itself.

“ Now you must acknowledge that only regard for you can have led me to write

this letter. You are a good fellow, and I want you to have your deserts. Give up your ill-paid work, your apron and your sign-board, take the speediest route to Rome, remain my guest till I bore you to death, accept my friendly services in the shape of money—if you need it—which you can repay by-and-by, and then go back to England and marry the girl you adore.

“By the way, I am doing my utmost to make up a pleasant little party for Venice next May. Of course you and Miss Fleming should be of the number, and I think I can easily persuade her to come out for a month. I shall not invite Kingsbury, and I have reason to believe he will be otherwise occupied. I hear he is being tremendously lionized in the north. His last visit was at the Earl of T——’s, and I understand he has fallen in love with Lady Maud, one of the daughters of the

house. The Earl hasn't a penny to give his daughters. There are six—and people say Lady Maud, who is a wit and a beauty, will become Lady Maud—something beginning with a K. Now, adieu. Rome is delightful, and your room is ready for you, when you like to come. Only send a line by telegram the day before.

“Truly yours,

“HUBERT PAPILLON.”

“Put three or four pounds of tea in your portmanteau, there's a good fellow—the best to be had in London. I can't write a line or compose a bar till I have drunk half a dozen cups of tea, and here the beverage called by that name is an abomination. *Au revoir!*”

Here was a letter to set Freeland thinking as he took his last solitary ramble on the Surrey hills, full of the thought that he

was to see Helwyse on the morrow. Moments of wavering on the same subject he had experienced many a time, alternating fits of indecision and resolve, when he had said to himself—I will—I will not—a dozen times a day. But now he felt that Papillon's letter found him with his mind wholly made up; and when his rambles and his work were over, the tea-tray removed, and the lamp burning brightly in the little parlour, he sat down and wrote as follows, hardly waiting to choose his words:—

“DEAR SIR,

“I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your friendly letter. I feel sure you will understand that I appreciate your kindness always, although in some instances I cannot bring my mind to accept it. Long before your letter came, I had thought the matter over, especially after our conver-

sation here some weeks back, and these are the conclusions to which I have come. In the first place, consider what a change in my circumstances, as you kindly propose furthering, would look like in the eyes of those whose opinions I value. Taking for granted, as you do, that I aspire to the affections of a woman who is, socially speaking, my superior, would it not be alike an insult to myself and to her to suppose that outward superiority only, the merest lendings of fortune and worldly advantage, could make me worthier of her? If a man is not loved for himself alone, stripped of all adventitious externals, no matter whether they are titles, position—so-called—or whatever else wealth and inherited prestige bestow, clearly, then, he is not loved at all. On the other hand, if a noble woman really cares for a man who stands on a lower social

level, whilst morally and intellectually he is her equal, then I say that her very nobility would herein be tested; she would disdain to take account of an inferiority that imposes on the common and worldly-minded only; she would glory in the sacrifice, in so far as it was a sacrifice; she would find her title of honour in what appeared, to all less noble than herself, an abasement.

“ Again, dear sir—and perhaps here I may appear Quixotic to you, or at least ambitious and unpractical—I feel in some sort bound to the class I belong to, and should thereby be compelled to quit for ever. It cost me a good deal to resign myself to my present position some years ago. You know the story of my early life, and how it was to support my mother and young sisters that I gave up the coveted career of an artist for the sake of earning

their daily bread. How easy the lifting up you urge upon me would have been then ! How bitter was the perspective coming down ! But when once the disappointment was over, and I had made up my mind to the inevitable, I was happy enough. Having no other prospects before me, I wanted to make the best of things, and to assimilate, as far as might be possible, the real with the ideal—in other words, though I was working for daily wages, I determined to be a gentleman. Now, incredulous as it may appear to you—for I know that you are a sceptic in these matters, and hold the so-called lower classes in contempt—I have shared this ambition with many others. There are workmen who have set themselves the task of living not only righteously, honestly, but temperately, wisely, nobly, who, like me, have said to themselves—we will be no man's

inferior, in so far as the inferiority rests with our own wills and capacities. We will reach the highest level we can, asking no man's help. And they have done this in spite of innumerable difficulties and obstacles. They have had to fight hard battles—not so much as might be supposed—with prejudice and envy and superciliousness, as with often inherited passions, with their own ignorance, selfishness, weakness. All over the civilized world the workman is being helped now, if he will but help himself. The age of social regeneration that so many dreamers have written about, so many good men have striven after, so many misguided lives in our own day have been sacrificed for, has set in at last, and it is our own fault if the work lags. Thus, I feel that, having cast in my lot with that of the once ill-treated, often over-abused, over-praised, and generally misunderstood

British workman, I could not conscientiously change it now. A hundred class interests, class ties, and class ambitions hold me back, and even were it not for the first reason I have given, would alone lead me to refuse the future you offer, tempting though it be.

“I am most grateful for the interest you take in my affairs. I wish I could have acted in accordance with your advice. But I hope I have made my reasons clear for doing otherwise, and beg to remain,

“Yours always, with sincere esteem,

“ARTHUR FREELAND.”

Freeland dispatched his letter without any after thought, and the next morning, as if on purpose to strengthen him in his high-spirited resolve, came a friendly little note from Helwyse. It was thus worded:—

“ DEAR MR. FREELAND,

“ My brother Bryan will bring Ambroise to-morrow evening, and would much like to have a little talk with you, if you can spare the time. Will you take supper with us at eight o’clock, as you will thus be sure not to miss him? I am glad to say that I am now quite well again, and I feel sure am much indebted to you for so quick a recovery. Ambroise is enchanted at the notion of coming here, but it was a sad disappointment to poor Patrice that I did not take him instead. Brigitte and Hilaire are well, and desired their love to you.

“ Sincerely yours,

“ HELWYSE FLEMING.”

What a sweet letter! thought Freeland, as he read it over at least a dozen times before putting it safely away in his writing-case. She had often written to him before,

but only in the briefest and most business-like way, beginning “Dear Sir,” ending “Yours faithfully, H. F.” and without any personal allusions whatever. Then that friendly invitation to supper—how it enraptured, elated, intoxicated him! He felt the happiest mortal under the sun as he penned his answer.

“ DEAR MISS HELWYSE,

“ I will with pleasure meet Mr. Fleming to-morrow at eight o’clock, as you kindly propose. I am delighted to hear that you are quite well again, and hope you will remember me kindly to Miss Brigitte and the little boy. I will do all in my power to get my pupil on, and if you would like him to live with me for a time, or I can in any other way be useful to you, pray do not hesitate to tell me.

“ Your faithful servant,

“ ARTHUR FREELAND.”

Poor Freeland thought of nothing else that day but what he could do to please Helwyse and the boy. He occupied himself throughout the railway journey with little schemes for amusing Ambroise, and relieving Helwyse of her responsibility. He knew that, when the time came, she would find her young charge somewhat of a burden and a hindrance, and there were a dozen ways in which he could help her. He could always have Ambroise with him on Sundays and Saturday half-holidays, for instance. He could have him in the evening, whenever Helwyse wanted to go out; he could give him lessons in fencing, could take him to the swimming baths, on the river in fine weather—in fact, could aid her much more than she dreamed of.

The prospect of being so helpful, so bound to her by these daily cares and ties, was delicious to him. He was ready

to sacrifice all that he most cared for, leisure, study, or recreation, in order to serve his sweet mistress, to prove his undying devotion, his ardent solicitude for her happiness. So long as Helwyse had the necessary time and ease of mind for her painting, he did not care how his own favourite pursuits and intellectual ambitions were sacrificed. Her kindness repaid him beforehand for all and more than he could do. Yes, there was no doubt Helwyse Fleming was the best, and loveliest, and most gracious thing in all the world to him. There was no one else at all like her, and he would strive to make her life all that she dreamed without thinking of his own.

CHAPTER III.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

IT was only natural that Helwyse should treat Freeland somewhat differently after their constant intercourse at Beechholme Park. How could it be otherwise ? During the last few weeks of her stay, there had been nothing to remind her of the difference between their social position, everything to bring home to her the great beauty, gentleness, and strength of his character. His devotion to her, moreover, and zealousness in the matter of helping with regard to Ambroise, deserved any kindness she could show him, besides which,

she already realized the fact that, when the boy was once with her, Freeland must stand more in the place of a friend than anything else. And there was yet another reason why Helwyse decided to treat him for the future exactly as she treated Papillon, Mr. Starffe, and the rest of her friends of the other sex. The girl's mind, naturally inquisitive and reflective, as every artistic mind must be, had been of late occupied in working out an intellectual problem for herself. She had never read a line of political economy, socialist speculation, or ethics. She had never heard of Plato's Republic, Sir Thomas More's Utopia, and Fourier's Phalansterianism, her reading in this direction being entirely restricted to *Aurora Leigh* and *Alton Locke*. Thus whatever conclusions she had arrived at were self-evoked and original. After pondering

deeply on the matter, it seemed to her as if the world, and herself included, had hitherto deeply erred in its treatment of Freeland. Here was a man who, by his own self-denial and exertions, had fitted himself for the best society, of course designating by that word not the richest, the showiest, the most elegant, but the wisest, the most enlightened, the most thoughtful; a man, furthermore, whose outward bearing matched the gentleness, largeness, and purity of his mind, who neither by word, gesture, nor look could ever affront the most fastidious company; a man, indeed, not only learned, but cultured, not only cultured, but accomplished, calculated to adorn whatever sphere he might enter. Such being the case, Helwyse thought, is it not narrow-minded, worldly, contemptible, to take account of those outward inequalities

which are mere matters of chance and circumstance, that whitewash which means nothing but accidental good fortune, and inherited favours, which is often only gloss and varnish, hiding moral and mental inferiority? Why should not equality be considered from a spiritual point of view? said the enthusiastic girl. Why should we not regard our fellows as we regard works of art, looking at the idea and the purpose before the execution, and that part of it which is material? Why, when forming that estimate which determines the career of another, do we not throw aside tradition, prejudice, good or evil report, and esteem men and women for what they really are, for their soul's worth, for their immortal and priceless, rather than for their worldly and perishable heritage? Mr. Freeland

is good, wise, manly, high-minded, she thought; how few of us have such claims to general respect, nay, reverence, how few could so abundantly recompense his fellows for the act of justice which should set him in his proper place?

So, without a thought of personal liking, without as much as a touch of sentiment, or womanly Quixotism, by virtue only of that truthfulness, candour, and tact which so often in her sex take the place of ripened wisdom, or acute philosophic insight, Helwyse had arrived at one of the leading conclusions of modern thinkers. She had not studied one of the most difficult questions in moral philosophy; she had nevertheless attained a clear idea of the great, the incomparable principle of equality, violated throughout all civilizations and all ages, for which kingdoms have been overturned,

blood of later-day martyrs shed like water, and the flower of humanity are striving even now !

It was not of course likely that Freeland should understand all that had passed in the young artist's mind. He only felt and rejoiced in the change. Helwyse had ever been kind and gracious to him, but her kindness and her graciousness were now more marked. She wished to show him that, at least in her eyes, he stood on the same level with the rest of her friends, that he was her friend, to be treated as such upon small occasions and great. Freeland accepted her sweetness and cordiality with almost childish pride and exultation. The least little word that was kinder than usual made his heart throb with joy ; the hand-shake, the invitation to sit down at her board, the daily

little friendliness which she now bestowed upon him, changed his whole life, made it radiant, hopeful with a new hope, all but perfect.

After that first supper, upon which occasion Freeland had testified some natural shyness, all went smoothly and pleasantly between the two. There were constant reasons why they should meet, and constant occasions of a little friendly talk about the boy. At this season of the year, too, Helwyse went out very little, many of her friends being still away from London, and so she threw her whole heart into her work and her new charge. With regard to the latter, Freeland was indeed a help. A boy is at best an intractable animal in such a home as Helwyse's had been up till now, that quiet temple dedicated to the Muses, that maiden's

bower undisturbed by a rude foot or a sacrilegious hand. It was not to be expected that poor Ambroise should not do some mischief, cause, in good Mrs. Bray's language, the very hair of her head to bristle, and play a dozen boyish tricks ; but he was not a monster, and when, at the end of the week, Helwyse said to Freeland somewhat nervously,

" Well, what do you think of your pupil ? "

She was re-assured by a careless—

" He will do well enough, Miss Helwyse ; but I think, if I were you, I would send him to a school for half the day. He can't read and write English at all."

" Oh ! dear," Helwyse said, much concerned. " I ought to have thought of that. To what school ? "

" I will see about it, if you like, and

make all the necessary arrangements. The weather is too bad for you to be running about."

"Thank you very much. Would it cost a good deal?" she asked.

She had no more experience of boykind than if she had been brought up in a desert island.

"Not much—about fifteen pounds a year."

She breathed a sigh of relief.

"But he had better not go till after Christmas," Freeland added. "What could you do with him in the holidays? Let him come to me for the present, and begin his schooling in January. And I have thought of something else, Miss Helwyse. I know you have many friends who want you on Sundays, and you might not perhaps always care to take Ambroise.

May he spend his Sunday afternoons with me?"

"How kind of you to think of it! I should be very glad indeed. You see," Helwyse said, quite confidentially, "Sunday is my resting day, and the only day in the week when I can spare the afternoon to pay visits. I could not always take Ambroise, because so many of my friends meet at each other's houses, and a boy would be sadly in the way. But would he not be in your way too?"

"Not at all. I shall like his company," Freeland answered. "I always get a country walk on fine days, or if I do take tea with a friend, I promise you he shall make no visits you could object to."

"Of course not. How can you say that?" she said, reproachfully. "Bryan

and I both know that we could trust him to the end of the world with you. Will you some afternoon take him to Hornsey Rise ? Bryan begged me to invite you."

"With pleasure—next Sunday, if you like."

"Pray do," she answered. "They will all be charmed, and I have been wondering how I could dispose of Ambroise. I am going with Mrs. Cornwell to visit Mr. Kingsbury's studio, and back with her to dinner. It will be delightful if you take Ambroise to Hornsey."

Poor Freeland's face suddenly clouded, and noticing it, she added, by way of making amends—

"I will go with you both the next time, if the weather is not too bad ; but these dark raw days I cannot often get so far.

Of course I shall spend Christmas there, and Bryan hopes you will accompany Ambroise on Christmas Eve, when the children have a Christmas tree."

Freeland thanked her not uncheerfully, and tried to comfort himself with what Papillon had said in his letter. He knew that Helwyse, as an artist, sat at Kingsbury's feet, and he acknowledged that Kingsbury possessed many attractions to a woman like Helwyse—genius, noble looks and bearing, abundance of mental gifts and graces. But he knew no more than this, and he was only too happy to believe Papillon, and to imagine Helwyse living "in maiden meditation, fancy free." He had long ago suspected Kingsbury of being in love with his fair young fellow-artist; no one had any right to suppose Helwyse in love at all, and Freeland, like

the rest of us, readily believed that it was with her as his hopes would fain have had it be.

So, without more than a passing feeling of accidental remoteness from Helwyse, and with no envy of the more favoured Kingsbury, he set out for Hornsey Rise the next Sunday afternoon. It was a day of intense dampness and darkness ; all London was enveloped in clinging shadow, and the suburban hills and valleys lying beyond King's Cross, so green and golden in summer-time, were hidden under a monotonous wide-spread veil of cold grey mist. Nothing could be drearier than London itself or its outlying precincts, and a lively fancy might have found something infernal in those dark, feebly-lighted subterranean galleries, with their perpetual shriek of the railway whistle—a Tartarus

resounding with the cries of the damned—through which the journey had to be made from one end of the mighty metropolis to the other.

But a bright fire and a cordial welcome awaited Freeland and his young charge on their arrival at Hornsey Rise. Bryan and Emilia regarded Freeland as a kind of Providence—Emilia especially, since he had been instrumental in reducing that terrible number Seven. Without Freeland's aid, Helwyse would never have managed anything so intractable as a boy—so, at least, thought Emilia, who, during the last few months, had received ample experience of a boy's propensities to tear his clothes, wear out his shoes, devour unimagined quantities of half-quartern loaves, sit on his Sunday hat, and otherwise manifest the old Adam that is in him. The

two, then, were warmly welcomed, Ambroise, by virtue of his fortnight's absence, being invested with all the dignity of a guest, and, of course, presuming on it not a little. When tea was over, and their elders retired to the drawing-room, the seven children gathered round the fire, and a confidential talk began.

"Well," said Patrice, who had never got over the disappointment and mortification of not being adopted by Aunt Helwyse instead of his younger brother—"well, I suppose you do just as you like, and eat cake every day?"

"Don't I—just!" Ambroise said, making a grimace of supreme self-satisfaction and lofty contempt for his listener. "Kensington is much nicer than Hornsey, Kathleen. I wouldn't come back for anything."

"I am sure we have been a great deal

happier without you, my dear boy," Kathleen said, as gravely as if she had been fifty years old. "Haven't we, Hilaire dear?"

"No, we have not," Hilaire answered, fondly embracing the unemotional Ambroise. "I like Ambroise to be here. I have no one to mend my guns and horses now."

"There, Kathie, that is what you get for your over civil speeches," Ambroise said, triumphantly. "I play with Rosie and Janie Cornwell now, and they wear silk frocks and ride in Rotten Row."

Kathleen's feminine inquisitiveness here got the better of her spite, and instead of administering satire, she sat still, dying to hear more.

"And Aunt Helwyse has such grand friends," Ambroise went on—"lords and

ladies, dukes and duchesses. I believe the Queen will be coming next. There are always footmen bringing notes——”

“Footmen with the flour on their heads, dress-coats and white stockings?” said Patrice, melancholy, but anxious for information.

“Just!” Ambroise cried. “And they rap at the door as if they would knock it in; and I take letters for Aunt Helwyse sometimes to such splendid houses—palaces, I mean. You could put two or three whole streets like these into one of them!”

“What a shame it was not I!” echoed Patrice, who, with his long limbs stretched out, his hands thrust into his pockets, and his childish face wearing a dismal expression, looked comically woeful.

Ambroise went on waving his hands, and raising his voice effectively—

“And when the door opens, I see such dazzling things!—I am blinded for hours after. Aladdin’s garden was nothing to it.”

“What kind of things?” asked little Norah, who believed every word.

“Gold and silver dishes a yard long, and mirrors in which a giant could see himself, and vases of precious stones, blue, red, and yellow, that gleam like the sun, and carpets so thick and soft your feet sink in them as if you were walking on piles of thistledown, and curtains with fringe of solid gold, and candelabra of solid silver that would hold as many wax-candles as there are days in the years.”

“You must have been quick to count them,” Hilaire said doubtfully.

“Of course Ambroise is exaggerating,” Brigitte interposed, losing patience. “Come, Ambroise, tell us what you do at Aunt Helwyse’s—exactly what you do, I mean.”

"Then there were not three hundred and sixty-five candlesticks in the candelabra, after all," Kathleen said, glad to be backed by Brigitte's authority in criticising Ambroise's narrative. "How can you tell such stories! If Aunt Helwyse knew it, I know what she'd do. She would just send you back, and I, for one, should be sorry."

"Come," Brigitte said sharply, "Ambroise will be going away directly. I heard Mr. Freeland say he could not stay later than eight o'clock. Let us hear something sensible."

"Mr. Freeland gave me that," Ambroise began, still determined to impose on the little assemblage. "Look at it, Patrice; did you ever see such a knife in your life? But I will give you my old one. I bought it on purpose."

Patrice accepted the old knife, and

admired the new enthusiastically. The two boys were capital friends, and when together seldom quarrelled or called each other names, as children say, more than once a week. Ambroise, who felt patronising towards poor Patrice, then produced a sixpence, saying,

“And Mr. Freeland gave me a shilling, but of course I could not keep it all. That would have been greedy. So here is the half for you, Patrice, on condition that you pay Hilaire and Norah a halfpenny each.”

“Oh! thank you—I’ll give you half my next shilling,” Patrice cried, delightedly pocketing the little coin, “and Hilaire and Norah must trust me till to-morrow.”

“And what have you got for us?” Norah said. Kathleen was far too correct-minded a little person to put such a question, though she was impatiently awaiting events. Am-

broise fumbled in his pockets with a magnificent air.

“A lump of gamboge and a carpenter’s pencil, Kathleen to choose first,” he said, holding up the delectable objects to view.

“And what for Brigitte?” asked Hilaire.

“Oh! Brigitte is too old to care for presents. And if I gave her anything, one of you would soon coax it out of her, wouldn’t they, Brigitte?” Ambroise replied comfortably, feeling that he was sure not to compromise himself as far as she was concerned. Brigitte, indeed, was looked upon by the younger children as being endowed with a superhuman indifference to goodies, trinkets, and other worldly delights—a re-assuring reflection to those especially inclined towards such gratifications. Her intense unselfishness, as often happens, had made them just a little selfish when her

own pleasures were concerned, and “ Brigitte never wants anything ” became an accepted apology for Brigitte never getting anything. The contents of Ambroise’s pockets, however, especially a final bag of sugar-plums divided between them, created a pleasing diversion, and the rest of the evening was spent harmoniously.

Meantime, Bryan had been well pleased to talk with Freeland upon many topics, Emilia listening as she turned over the pages of a Sunday journal. The city clerk was debarred from such intercourse with his fellows as he craved for by many things. In the first place, those with whom he was most thrown, city clerks like himself, had little in common with the sensitive-minded, reflective, aspiring man, whose favourite reading was poetry, and whose dream had been to become a poet himself some day. Again, his modest

means had ever prevented him from indulging in that costliest of all modern luxuries, society so called, and excepting Mr. Starffe and Helwyse, he rarely encountered anyone who cared to discuss books and other favourite topics. So, when he found that Freeland was an ardent reader, as he had once been, and possessed what poor Bryan did not, a richly-furnished mind, the two became excellent friends, all the more so because they had this in common.

Bryan, therefore, as well as Freeland, was in some senses better than his circumstances —that is to say, Bryan, as well as Freeland, had qualities that fitted him for a higher calling. When Emilia quitted the room to prepare supper, their conversation took a more confidential, and therefore a more interesting turn still. They talked of themselves and their thoughts, as men do

who, on being brought suddenly near together out of the great press and tumult of the world, feel drawn to each other like brothers, attracted by that unfailing magnet, a common renunciation and a common need.

"I hope you will come very often," Bryan said. "We all look upon you as an old friend now, and my sister says you have almost entirely relieved her of the boy. It is very kind."

"Miss Helwyse has enough to do without having a youngster on her hands," Freeland answered, smiling. "I am only too glad to spare her as much responsibility as I can. If she is fretted in little things, she will not be able to work well—no artist can."

"I said all that I could to dissuade her from taking Ambroise," Bryan said, anxiously. "She insisted, but I shall never

forgive myself if he hinders her career in any way. I am very proud of my sister," he added, looking at Freeland with a wistful expression.

" You may well be. But I assure you, if things do not work smoothly with Miss Helwyse and her young charge, I will let you know. You see, I am on the spot, and can judge perhaps better than anyone."

" True, I see very little of Helwyse now. Kensington and Hornsey Rise are so far apart, and Helwyse moves in a sphere still farther removed from mine. A poor city clerk like myself has no claims upon the brilliant world in which she shines."

Both men were silent after this dreary speech. Freeland was thinking whether the words might not be equally applicable to himself. Bryan, in spite of his devotion to Helwyse, was naturally infected by

Emilia's dissatisfaction now and then. When a wife is perpetually telling her husband that he is ill-used by fate, born under an unlucky star, too good for his circumstances, in fact, he ends by believing her. Emilia, who dearly loved her husband, could not always forgive Helwyse for the gifts and circumstances that had set her on a higher social level. Bryan had talents as well as she, but Bryan was poor, insignificant, despised, whilst Helwyse was rich in friends and reputation. Helwyse was already mounting the ladder of fame, Helwyse was feted, flattered, heaped with honours and praise. Bryan had not a particle of envy in his composition—he would have been content to see Helwyse a duchess, and remain himself a humble city clerk all the days of his life. But there was one thing he craved, one longing that possessed him, for which he

will be readily forgiven. He coveted that meritoriousness and that recognition which are perhaps the deepest intellectual joys we know of. Like the sweet poet cut off in the flower of his youth by the revolutionary sword, he touched his brow, feeling that “something was there.” He longed to do not the bidding of his material needs, but the mandate of his soul, to appear at his best for a little while, before “the night cometh when no man can work.”

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND IN THE CITY.

THE winter was a rude one, and tried the health and spirits of the little household at Hornsey Rise severely. Long before Christmas all the hilltops were white with snow, whilst across the brown, miry fields swept a bitter east wind, fatal as a plague-breath to the young and the feeble. No bright, unclouded skies and brisk mountain air here, as in Brigitte's beloved Dauphiné, no unbroken spell of clear wintry weather, when at noonday the sun is brilliant still, and you are sure of fine days for weeks to come, but snow and sleet one

day, rain and fog the next, frost and biting winds on a third, with an occasional spell of "darkness that might be felt," to make up the sum of discomfort. The children shivered and saddened under such depressing influences, and no wonder.

It was often too wet for even Patrice to get a run, and the lad longed for school, apprenticeship, anything to do, as a caged bird for liberty. Hilaire caught cold after cold, and would have pined away, but for Brigitte's unvarying care. She often lay awake at night, devising little schemes to amuse him and pass away the time—that dreary time which had never seemed a burden in their bright, smiling France! Even church-going was now a dreary thing; in fine weather Uncle Bryan used to take them across the fields to old Hornsey Church, or sometimes by way of One Tree Hill and the pleasant banks of the

New River to Stoke Newington. But this was all over, and, accustomed as were these children to the gorgeous pageantry and delicious music of a foreign cathedral, they could not reconcile themselves to the cold service of the little iron church close by to which they went on account of its handiness.

And it was not likely that Brigitte, and even Patrice, in a slighter degree, should be insensible to the cares weighing upon their protectors. Not a word was said in their hearing about the price of coals, or the necessity of letting the baker's bill run a little longer, but Brigitte's faculties had been sharpened by bitter experience, and she fully realised what a bitter winter meant to Aunt Emmie and Uncle Bryan. When the former was irritable and apt to scold about trifles, when the latter ate his supper in silence, and moodily absorbed himself in a book as soon as the tray was

removed, the girl knew, as well as they could have told her, what was the matter. Patrice, less keenly alive to other people's moods, and always inclined to be carelessly happy, as long as he was not the immediate object of the general gloom, only made himself uncomfortable now and then about affairs generally. He could not bear foggy days, he hated having nothing to do, but, like a young animal, could wear a tolerably cheerful countenance as long as he was well housed, well fed, and got into no scrapes.

Meantime, Brigitte was secretly nursing a scheme which was her chief consolation. She had not much time to herself, this poor Brigitte!—especially in the holidays, when she had five children to look after, besides hearing the little girls' pianoforte practice and French dictation every day, and helping Aunt Emmie with the mending and the

housework. Mary Ann had been summarily dismissed for impertinence, and, to Brigitte's inexpressible relief, Emilia declared that she could not afford to hire anyone in her place. So the girl, who would have done the cook's work as well, swept the chimney, cleaned out the dust-bin, and performed any other menial office, at last found herself triumphantly necessary to her aunt. With a light heart, and a mind relieved of an awful dread, she set to work to fill her round of duties, caring for nothing so long as she was only permitted to remain with Hilaire. If Emilia had to find fault at all, it was for her over-zeal.

"Brigitte," she would say sharply, yet without unkindness, "you are constantly disobeying me. Do I not tell you a dozen times a day not to make such a slave of yourself? Leave the stairs for Maria to

sweep for the future ; and as to cleaning the windows, I cannot permit it. Who-ever heard of a young lady doing such a thing!"

" Dear Aunt Emmie," Brigitte answered, with the utmost good-nature, " I am always so busy I forget what I ought to do and what I ought to leave to Maria. It would be shameful to sit down with my hands before me, when she is overwhelmed with work."

" You ought to be improving yourself instead. What will you do to gain a living by-and-by ? You must really find time to go on with your arithmetic and history," Emilia said. " You know your uncle said he would help you on Saturdays."

" Yes, aunt, I will work hard after the holidays. I do learn my tables and dates whilst I darn the stockings," Brigitte added, cheerfully ; " and Kathleen hears me spell every day."

There were frequently little skirmishes of this kind taking place between the two, but Brigitte bore her aunt's reproaches with a light heart, and took refuge in the secret consolation before alluded to, a consolation so secret that she had not even breathed a word about it to Hilaire. One day Uncle Bryan had given her an odd volume of Shakespeare's plays, saying—

“Now, Brigitte, if you really wish to know your mother tongue, learn this book by heart, and you will understand it better than most people who have never spoken anything else all their lives. When you have mastered a passage, recite it to me.”

This little volume, which Bryan had picked up for a few pence at a bookstall, contained, amongst other plays, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Brigitte had never read a novel in her life, and was no

sooner plunged, as it were, headlong into those magnificent plays than she realised, for the first time, that wondrous inner life, hardly less real than existence itself, which a great poet like Shakespeare is able to create for us out of his own brain. Here she had something to ponder over and rejoice in outside the too often dreary world of common daily experience, as high above, as far removed from it as the starry canopy of heaven, the pearls gleaming at the bottom of the sea! Shakespeare soon filled the place of that exquisite church music and imposing church ceremonial she had so painfully missed; and as, in former days, she had found refuge from grief and anxiety within the walls of a cathedral, so now, when things were going wrong, and her young heart was heavy, she fled to her beloved Shakespeare, who never failed to give her comfort.

But after the first, the exultant recognition of kingdoms unexplored, intellectual domains yet to be reached, realm upon realm to discover by-and-by, came a homelier, yet deeper feeling. Poor Brigitte was compelled to be essentially practical, and even in her moments of spiritual exultation, felt the paramount need of her daily life, namely, to earn money. She never forgot what Papillon had said to her about the possibility of becoming an actress or dramatic reader, and an incident that happened after her return from Beechholme Park, now turned her thoughts in the same direction. Uncle Bryan had taken all the children one evening to a Penny Reading, so called, at the Sunday School, at which one of the leading features in the entertainment was a lady's recitations from Shakespeare.

"Does that lady get paid for doing this?"
Brigitte asked Uncle Bryan under her

breath, and he had answered hastily,

“ Of course, child, and very well too.”

Brigitte was straightway set a-thinking. Why could not she acquire such a knowledge of Shakespeare as would enable her to figure at Penny Readings some day? She felt sure she should never feel afraid of speaking before a crowd of people, so long as she was earning money for Hilaire, or thereby enabling herself to remain with him always. Brigitte never realized the idea that Hilaire, like the others, could forsake her for a career and for the world ; and her thoughts and emotions centred round him, no dream of a romantic or even ordinary woman’s future, no girlish prefiguring of love and marriage for a moment taking the place of that intense and passionate devotion, that unbounded bestowal of affection and largess, which to a generous nature gives supremo, holier

joy than any amount of love received. No sooner did she understand upon what principle Penny Readings and other Sunday School entertainments were conducted than she was fired with a desire to become a public reader, and thus secure an independence. She had a quick memory for the things she loved, and very soon mastered a few striking passages from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. These she would recite in the twilight, dressing up as best she could, in order to please the little ones, and heighten the general effect. When she gave Lady Macbeth's famous speech, made in her sleep, the children trembled, and "all the sweets of Arabia would not whiten this little hand" was the signal for Norah and Hilaire to give a little shriek, and clutch hold of Patrice's arm. The ghost scene in *Hamlet* was more exciting still. When Brigitte appeared—acting the part of

Hamlet, Patrice personating the ghost, wrapped up in a sheet—the four young listeners sat as close to each other as they could possibly get, hands clasped, crimsoning, trembling, breathing hard, in an ecstasy of fear and admiration. Little Norah would hide her face under her pinafore, only daring to give occasional peeps at the awful, the superhuman Patrice, whose share in the performance would, however, have made it a mere farce, but for Brigitte's real tragic power.

They never grew tired of that ghost scene any more than they got over the fright of it, a fright, perhaps, mostly in their imagination, but none the less real, and certainly all the more delightful. Then Brigitte would get up little plays for all, such as *Alfred the Great*, out of *Evenings at Home*, and when everything went smoothly, and Mr. Starffe came to tea, the play would

be acted under her management. The little party were invited to the usual Christmas Tree at the Rectory, and *Alfred the Great* was given by Brigitte and her troupe, to Aunt Emmie's great delight, who naturally saw in Kathleen's and Margie's performances dramatic talent of a very high order. The Rector and the Rectoress spoke of it among friends and neighbours, and Emilia and Bryan were complimented on the young people's achievements for weeks after.

On the whole, Christmas came cheerily in spite of the bitter weather. It brought skating for Patrice, Helwyse, and Ambroise on Christmas Day, little gifts and gratifications for the children, and friendlinesses all round. The general bustle and hilarity of the season, moreover, when even the Seven Sisters' Road and the Islington High Street blazed with colour, and the

humblest and the poorest received some share of the transient merry-making, were infectious. Bryan was so unusually gay that Emilia fancied something must have been said about an increase of salary in the city ; but she did not ask. The two had lived just a little apart of late, both somewhat in the wrong, both longing for the old, unbroken confidence, but neither seeing how to attain it. Bryan had especially reproached himself for Emilia's anxious looks during the last few weeks. He was the husband, the father, the head of the household, he said, and on his shoulders surely the burden of daily life should mainly rest. So, one morning about this time, he said, as he kissed her before taking his place,

“Come, Emmie, do not let us take things so much to heart for the future. Let us forget and forgive, and turn over a new leaf with the new year.”

“I am sure it is time,” Emilia answered, practical even in her softest moments. “Of what use to worry ourselves into the grave?”

“No, indeed, that will come soon enough,” Bryan said; “and, Emmie, my dear, don’t worry about money matters any more.” He added, with an attempt at carelessness and blushing faintly, “Here is money to pay the outstanding bills. Two ten pound notes, and an odd five for Patrice’s outfit and school fees.”

“Oh! you dear Bryan,” Emilia cried, suddenly radiant, and seizing the notes with a joyful clutch. “What a comfort! I think I was never so delighted at the sight of money in my life. You see, the baker called yesterday, and seemed a little put out, not uncivil, but cross at not being paid; and the shoemaker, I am sure, wants his money. Eight

extra pairs make the bill so large ! But this will set me up nicely, and pay everything. Where did you get it ? ”

“ Honestly,” Bryan said, his face still buried in his newspaper. “ The fact is, Emmie, it is impossible for us to make my income do for a year or two. We must pay the tradespeople.”

“ Of course we must. I suppose you have got an advance of salary. How lucky ! ”

“ Well, no. But,” and here poor Bryan blushed scarlet behind the *Times*—“ but a friend in the city has lent it to me till I do.”

“ How kind ! And, of course, in two or three years’ time, we shall be much better off,” Emilia continued, never looking up from the bread-and-butter cutting. “ Patrice will be able to earn his living by that time. Brigitte can go out as a daily

governess, and we shall only have little Hilaire on our hands."

"And who knows what may turn up?" Bryan answered. "I may get promoted, somebody may leave us some money, a dozen things may happen."

"I am glad you did not go to Helwyse, Bryan. It is quite right and proper that she should take one of her brother's orphans. But I could not bear you to borrow of her."

"I would starve first, Emmie. Helwyse will marry some day. It would be hard, indeed, if she could not have the fruits of her talents as a little dowry."

"But it is only fair that she should do something for these poor children. Now don't go and take Ambroise away, just because we are easy about money matters."

"I have no intention whatever of taking Ambroise away—unless he turns out to be

more than Helwyse can manage. And, of course, if she marries, we must have him back."

"Then I hope she will not marry just yet. Is there any likelihood of that?"

"I think I know one man Helwyse would marry if he asked her to-morrow."

"Oh! of course you mean the great Mr. Kingsbury! But, Bryan, he is such a very grand personage. Would he dream of marrying a girl in Helwyse's position?"

"My dear Emmie, could a girl be in a nobler position? Tell me that."

Emilia was too light-hearted just then to take such a speech amiss. The thought of being able to pay the bills had lifted every other cloud from her mind.

"I hope if Helwyse cares for him that he will marry her, I am sure," she said.

Then the children came down to breakfast, and the conversation ended. As soon as the meal was over, the household work finished, the younger children sent out for a walk under Brigitte's charge, Emilia put on her bonnet and cloak and set out on that pleasantest of all errands to housekeepers in straitened circumstances—namely, to pay her bills. A repentance took possession of her for her recent conduct to Bryan. The sum total of daily worries had occasioned it, she now said to herself, but she would exercise more self-control for the future, and all should be openness and peace between them, as in former days. In the excess of her penitence, Emilia felt guilty towards the children, and determined never to breathe a word more about sending Brigitte away, who, moreover, was most useful in the house. She would do her best to economise in

small things ; and Bryan should not come home again to a clouded face and a long list of anxieties and wants. For Emilia the New Year began well.

Very different were poor Bryan's feelings as he went to his work that bright winter morning. He felt indeed much like a man who, consciously, remorsefully, yet with a wilful determination to go on, finds himself on the threshold of opium-eating, absinthe-drinking, and a course of pure drunkenness and debauchery. The carelessness that had deceived Emilia hid a foreboding heart. He knew, as well as his best friends could have told him, that the remedy he sought was a desperate one, that the path he entered upon must, if persisted in, lead to misery and disgrace. But, weak where his affections were concerned, and especially weak with regard to his wife, whose anxious looks and growing

irritability had of late rendered daily existence a burden, he foolishly and fatally, but, it must be admitted, naturally, chose a palliative rather than a cure, an anodyne rather than the surgeon's knife. So instead of courageously facing the evil, and overcoming all obstacles by the force of will, unaided and alone, he preferred to let things run their pleasant course for the time, and leave the rest to chance—in other words to get into debt.

“The friend in the city,” veiled a mystery of which poor Emilia never dreamed. And Bryan, when the keen edge of his remorse was over, sheltered himself behind the consolatory Inevitable. To say to ourselves that a thing must be, without taking into account all the circumstances depending upon it, is often a salve to wounded consciences when other curatives fail, and again and again Bryan reiterated the words

he had used to Emilia—"The people must be paid," throwing the means into the background. In time, he too grew quite reconciled to his new position.

CHAPTER V.

PATRICE'S EXPLOITS.

WHEN the day came for Patrice to go to school, no boy in all London was half so proud as he. He strutted like a cock as soon as he put on his square college cap, blew himself out like the frog in *Æsop's Fables* when he shouldered his new satchel, and, in fine, walked down the road so consequentially that all the neighbours looked on, declaring the sight as good as a play. His young heart swelled with pride as he mounted the omnibus that was to convey him to his destination, and if there was one dream more than another he felt

sure of realizing that proud and happy morning, it was that he should sit on the woolsack. In a few days he should be at the head of his class, in a few weeks promoted; he should carry off all the classical prizes by turns, then the Oxford scholarship, and so should mount the ladder of fortune step by step till he sat on the very top.

Thus mused Patrice as he surveyed himself complacently, parcel-wise, now holding up one foot to admire his new boots, now stretching forward one arm to admire the cut of his coat-sleeve, now taking off his college cap under the pretence that it wanted brushing. Then he fumbled in his pocket for the money Aunt Emmie had given him for his dinner, and looked at it again and again, opened his satchel and conned his Latin books with as pedantic an expression as if he already knew them by heart, and altogether was so absorbed

in the multitude of his new sensations that he allowed the omnibus to carry him a mile too far. In consequence of such forgetfulness he had to run back as fast as his legs could carry him, arriving just in time, but hot, out of breath, and looking generally undignified. Poor Patrice's exploits were the reverse of brilliant. He was a boy without a vice, but, alas ! without that worldly quality of cautiousness which often, for mere comfort's sake, makes us prefer a more faulty character. Before a week was over, instead of getting to the top of his class, he had tumbled into a pond, thus damaging the new clothes of which he had been so proud; then he got into a crowd to see Punch and Judy, and had his hat smashed past recognition ; lastly, he performed so many playful tricks in the schoolroom that he obtained the maximum

number of bad marks within the first fortnight. These, however, were boyish delinquencies and to be borne, but when one day he came home, sentenced to a week's forced absence, for what in pedagogic language was called "incitement to belligerent habits," and with a black eye into the bargain, both Emilia and Bryan lost patience.

"I couldn't help it," cried Patrice piteously, wiping away the big tears with his coat-sleeve. "One of the boys laughed at me because of my foreign name and accent, and called me 'a damned Frenchman.' I'm not a Frenchman. I'm an Englishman. I won't submit to be called a Frenchman."

"My dear lad," Bryan said vexed, but inclined to be lenient, "if they called you a damned Hottentot, would it make you any worse? You must pass over these things. You see, another bout would perhaps entail dismissal from the school——"

"And you would have to serve behind a counter," Emilia put in, she also just now severe, more from a sense of duty than anything else. Next to Hilaire, Emilia preferred Patrice of the four orphans, and indeed, with his childish face blurred with tears, his big manly form bound in an attitude of despair, he looked such a personification of boyish woe as very few maternal hearts could resist.

Emilia was not one of those women whose motherly sympathies—and such women are often "spinsters," so called, on whose kindly breasts no little ones have smiled—are called forth by the sight of any youthful unhappiness. But things had been going well with her of late, and when such was the case, when all was smooth between Bryan and herself, and there were no outstanding tradesmen's bills or pressing daily wants, she felt well

disposed enough to these children. Had they been rich instead of poor, she would doubtless have acted very differently from the beginning ; as it was, she was always on the alert lest she should not be wronging her own.

“ You would have to serve behind a counter,” she reiterated. “ You seem always to forget, Patrice, that your uncle is not rich. We cannot be giving you a fresh start in life every day.”

“ I’m very sorry, Aunt Emmie, but I couldn’t help it,” sobbed Patrice. “ You don’t know what it is to have a boy making faces at you, and calling you names before the whole school.”

“ Well, well,” Bryan said, “ do not let it happen again. Pluck up heart, Patrice, and be too much of a man to mind trifles. That is all.”

No more was said, but poor Patrice

slunk out of doors, feeling at that moment as if he should like nothing so well as serving behind a counter. He was old enough to see that his conduct troubled Uncle Bryan, and that conviction hurt him more than any severity could have done. He knew, too, that it troubled Brigitte even more, and without going to her for comfort this time, he put on his hat, and with his hands thrust disconsolately into his pockets, his chin buried in his waistcoat, and dragging along his feet as if they were burdens, he walked down the high road leading to Islington.

It was a cheery winter day; the pavements were crowded with busy housekeepers making their morning's purchases, and the rubicund-faced shopmen looked so encouragingly at passers-by, that Patrice felt strengthened to carry out the purpose with which he had left home.

"Could I get a place?" he said to himself. "I am a strong boy, and very tall of my age. I wear men's boots, and have the biggest feet of any boy in the school. I am sure Uncle Bryan and Aunt Emmie would be glad to get rid of me. Yes, I will try."

But the trembling query put to these florid cheesemongers and grocers—for poor Patrice's ambition was of the humblest—"Please, sir, do you want a youth to help in the shop?" met with anything but a warm response. It seemed odd to the inexperienced Patrice that, where so many lads were employed, just one more should not be needed! He did not, however, allow himself to be discouraged, and when he reached that animated nucleus of activity proudly known to Islingtonians as Highbury Corner, he continued his walk down the glittering High Street, still making

the inquiry whenever he encountered a friendly-looking shopman standing in the doorway—

“Please, sir; *do* you want a youth?”

That little word “*do*,” so carelessly uttered at first, was pathetically emphasized as he went on, and there were tears in his eyes as he made it for the last and dozenth time.

“Well, as it happens, I shall be wanting a lad in a few days,” said a cherry-faced baker, who was a student of human nature, as well as an adept in tarts. “But come, now, you’re not a real boy, are you?—You’re a runaway, I can see.”

Patrice blushed up to his ears, and stood speechless.

“You see,” continued the baker, who, amongst the circle of his friends, was considered a wit, “I know, before I taste it, if one tart was put in the oven half an hour

later than another—and so I can tell a genuine boy wanting a place from a runaway as soon as I set eyes on him."

"How can you tell?" asked Patrice, overwhelmed by this profound knowledge of pastry and the human heart.

"How can I tell? Well, a genuine boy doesn't hunch up his shoulders and hang down his head, and look as if he had just committed murder—like this," answered the baker, receding into the shop, and imitating Patrice's attitude and manner of speaking, to the infinite delight of the young lady behind the counter, and two apprentices shelving buns behind a glass door. "A genuine boy walks straight up to me, and looks me in the face, and—'I'm going fourteen, and have got two years' character,' says he; and then he squares himself like a soldier on parade, whilst I survey him from top to toe."

Patrice stood cowed with confusion before such a display of superhuman wisdom, but his curiosity was far as yet from satisfied.

“And how do you distinguish the tarts?” he said.

“That is a secret only known to the trade, not to be purchased for all the gold in the Mint.” Then, taking [up his tarts, he added, looking hard at Patrice, whose face gradually changed from grave to gay, much as a landscape changes in dissolving views from Arctic tempest to Italian calm —“Now, young gentleman, as I am sure, you will give me all your custom for the future——”

“That I will,” cried Patrice, with great emphasis.

“And as I don’t dislike the looks of you, you shall experiment on these tarts. There is as much difference between their

ages as between my mother's brother's nephew and me, and I'll be bound to say you won't find out the difference."

Patrice ate the tarts with more haste than gastronomic discrimination, and when he had done, said, smacking his lips—

"I think then you must be both of an age, sir."

This innocent speech set the baker laughing so immoderately that the young lady behind the counter caught the infection, the two apprentice boys giggled, and poor Patrice, seeing his mistake, hastened to remedy it.

"Of course, your mother's brother's nephew is yourself!" he said, now laughing in his turn.

"Of course," replied the baker; "and as I see you are a lad of some parts, I'll give you a word of advice. Go home, be a good boy, and don't look after a place

till your friends bid you. I've known scores of runaways in my time, bless you, and none have come to any good. One committed burglary, and got the cat-o'-nine-tails ; one murdered his own mother, and died on the gallows ; one was disembowelled by Chinese pirates on the high seas ; another became a prize-fighter, and was killed in the ring ; a fifth was caught by cannibals, and served up, roasted whole, at a feast ; a sixth——”

Just then the entrance of a customer, with a red book and a long account to settle, put a stop to the baker's horrifying discourse. In the twinkling of an eye he was behind the desk, wearing the look and manner of ordinary life, apparently as oblivious of Patrice's presence as if he were miles away. Under these circumstances, the lad beat a retreat, feeling less miserable than before, and determined to

pursue his inquiries no farther. But his adventures were not over, and in after-life, you may be sure, all these experiences, made up of mingled laughter or tears, were told to his children again and again.

He was slowly making his way home-wards, when he felt a small hand clutching at his elbow, and a feeble little voice crying appealingly—

“Master Patrice, Master Patrice, do help me with my parcels.”

Looking down, Patrice beheld the kindly face and diminutive stature of their near neighbour, Miss Wren. She was a very small creature indeed, not quite a dwarf, but so tiny and slender that, by comparison with the big, broad-shouldered Patrice, she appeared dwarfish. The little old lady was a great favourite with all the children, and to be invited to take tea with Miss Wren, and hear her musical-box, was one

of the greatest treats that could be offered them. No sooner, therefore, was Patrice thus appealed to, than, very proudly and delightedly, he shouldered her bag, loaded himself with her parcels, and, in spite of all that she could say, took possession of her umbrella.

“Thank you kindly, Master Patrice,” said Miss Wren, slowly recovering her breath. “You see, when I come so far, I like to set myself up with everything I want, and I dare not, for the life of me, get a boy out of the streets to help me. Why, he might slip up a side alley and make off with them before I knew where I was. But how lucky for me that I met you ! Have you a holiday ?”

Patrice stood in no awe of the gentle little woman, who would almost have petted a wasp after stinging her, and, with much blushing and hesitation, told the story of his disgraces.

"Oh! dear, I'm very sorry. But I'm sure you won't do it again, and boys will be boys, I know," said Miss Wren, emphasizing the last sentence, much as if she were dwelling on the propensities of tigers or anacondas. "You won't fight any more, will you, Master Patrice? It makes my hair stand on end to think of it."

"No, I won't," Patrice said stoutly.

"That's a good boy—you are not squeezing my new cap, or smashing my eggs, are you? Dear me, what a comfort to have all my parcels carried for me, without any risk of having them run away with! You must come home to dinner with me, and help to unpack the groceries, and do some errands after. A boy is so useful!"

Patrice accepted the invitation joyously, Aunt Emmie accorded permission, being only too glad to have him occupied, and so this day, which had begun after such dis-

mal fashion, ended with contentment for the poor lad after all. His kind old friend devised all sorts of little tasks for him, and when the afternoon drew in, dismissed him with a pocket full of apples, and a heart full of good resolutions.

CHAPTER VI.

“PORTRAITS BY AN OLD MASTER.”

IT must not be supposed that, if Patrice was a thorn in Emilia's side, Ambroise always behaved like an angel. No more than a tiger can change his skin, or a leopard his spots, can that terrible boy-nature of which little Miss Wren spoke so apprehensively, help betraying itself. Had it not been for Freeland, Helwyse felt that her task would have indeed seemed insupportable, but after a few escapades, Ambroise settled down, and when once entered as a student of a neighbouring school,

matters went smoothly. The boy's education was so backward that it was decided to keep him entirely at school for a few months, Freeland giving him technical instruction at odd times.

"If he has real talent, he shall go to South Kensington," Helwyse said, and Ambroise had quite made up his mind by this time that he should become a Royal Academician, and be as much made of as Aunt Helwyse some day. He loved his friend Freeland heartily, and was never so happy as when with him. No one, in his eyes, not even Mr. Kingsbury, was so clever.

"Mr. Freeland does this, Mr. Freeland does that, Aunt Helwyse," he would say a dozen times a day, and Helwyse naturally felt well pleased that it should be so. A boy must have a hero, and could a better

be found for Ambroise than Arthur Freeland ?

In spite of her determination to treat Freeland for the future like any other friend, occasional embarrassments would naturally spring up. For instance, she could never set him at his ease in Kingsbury's presence. Kingsbury was the last person in the world to affront any man's susceptibilities, much less those of a man he esteemed and liked, yet no sooner had the artist entered the room than all Freeland's ease and self-possession were at an end. Neither Helwyse nor Kingsbury could in the least comprehend so sudden a change. When the two men were alone together all went smoothly and pleasantly ; when only Ambroise was by, Freeland could talk to Helwyse without a trace of shyness. Kingsbury's presence spoiled all.

Still the winter was a very pleasant one to Helwyse and her friends. Freeland often came in after tea to help Ambroise with his Euclid and arithmetic, and Helwyse would generally be by, either busy at her embroidery frame, or preparing her palettes for the next day. Sometimes Freeland would read aloud to the boy—which meant reading aloud to Helwyse as well—a chapter of English History, or a canto of *The Fairy Queen*, and when it was over, the three discussed the subject in hand, Freeland being appealed to as a supreme critic or authority. Or Helwyse would play to both, Ambroise delightedly turning over the leaves, Freeland listening, enraptured, his gaze fastened on that fair girlish head all the while.

Then the supper-tray would be brought in, the simplest repast possible ; yet Freeland would not have exchanged it for

those princely banquets to which Kingsbury was sometimes bidden. Helwyse always made him supper now; it would, indeed, have been the height of inhospitality to let him return home hungry after coming out these bitter nights for the boy's sake. So Freeland, who really devoted himself to his pupil, spent much more time and money about him than Helwyse knew, was thus doubly and trebly rewarded, and, it need hardly be said, blinded as well. How could it be otherwise? In so far as Helwyse's conduct was concerned, nothing now reminded him of the differences of their social position—everything made him feel that, in her mind, they were unreal and contemptible. Must he not have possessed more strength than is accorded to mortal men? —had he not deluded, enchanted, bewitched himself? He was but drifting, as we all

do, over a smooth and enticing current, not listening to the voice of the enchanter, but saying at the moment, “Stay, for thou art fair!” Of the future as yet he dared not think. Why, indeed, should he think of it?

It happened that, earlier in the year, a common friend had sent out invitations for a fancy ball, to which both Helwyse and Kingsbury were bidden. The brilliant Lady Maud, of whom Papillon had written to Freeland, and Helwyse had heard cursorily, remained as yet in the background. If a strong argument were needed to refute floating rumours concerning Kingsbury’s admiration for this lady, it was surely his admiration for Helwyse. When the fancy ball was announced, he threw himself heart and soul into her costume, persuaded her to imitate a certain portrait from an old master in the Munich gallery, procured the velvet and lace necessary for the gown,

designed the head-dress and trimming, decreed what ornaments and flowers were to be worn, finally went in search of a hair-dresser who could arrange her hair to his taste.

“And your dress?” Helwyse asked, smiling, naturally pleased at such zeal on her own behalf.

The artist, who was considered one of the handsomest men in London, shrugged his shoulders with as much nonchalance as if he had never looked in a looking-glass throughout the course of his career.

“What does it matter what a man wears?” he answered.

Still, as all those who have studied the human heart know well enough, the one sex is as vain as the other, and will not need to be told that on those little errands concerning velvet, old lace, and brocade, Kingsbury also performed a few commis-

sions in the same direction for himself. But he affected complete indifference on the subject, and, in fact, no one felt sure, till the day came, that he had made up his mind to go to the ball at all.

What was Mrs. Cornwell's surprise, therefore, when, in the midst of her toilette —for she was one of those persons who like to do everything at leisure, and had begun to dress early—to receive the following note:—

“ DEAR MRS. CORNWELL,

“ I think you said you were going to call for Miss Fleming, and chaperone her to Lady Adeline's ball. Will you send round the carriage for me first, and allow me the pleasure of escorting you both?

“ Yours truly,

“ EDWARD KINGSBURY.”

"How pleasant," she said to her husband when he came upstairs to prepare for dinner. "But I wish you were going too, Harry!"

"My dear Rose, it is all very well for you young people to befool yourselves," answered the banker; he was just five years older than his wife, but with the amiable vanity of a devoted husband, considered her permanently youthful. "At my time of life I cannot go to a masquerade."

"What nonsense—but you are satisfied with my appearance, my dear?"

"Well, turn yourself round a bit. Yes, I see nothing to alter. You make a very creditable Catharine of Braganza indeed," he said, surveying her admiringly from head to foot.

"I am delighted Mr. Kingsbury wishes to escort Helwyse. It is such a hopeful sign," said the wife.

"Good heavens, my dear, of what?
He hasn't got the measles, has he?"

"Oh, Harry, how stupid of you! I mean
that it looks as if he were in love with
her."

"If Mr. Kingsbury doesn't make a grand
match, he might possibly condescend to
marry Miss Fleming," the banker answered
drily. "Such men get a little spoiled. A
plain, homely fellow like me is the husband
I should recommend her."

"So should I," said the wife, kissing
him; then the two went down to dinner.
Dressing for a fancy ball in Palace Gardens
was nothing so very unusual, but under
Helwyse's modest roof, the affair caused a
good deal of excitement.

Brigitte had come over to dress her aunt.
Ambroise had begged that Freeland might
look in for a moment to see her costume,

and good Mrs. Bray had insinuatingly asked the same favour—"Just for my niece, miss, a very nice young person who has seen your pictures in the 'Cademy, and my brother-in-law who keeps the green-grocer's shop round the corner—a man, to be sure, miss, but as quiet and inoffensive as a lamb, I do assure you."

When at last her task was achieved, the delighted Brigitte led Helwyse downstairs, where the little party were assembled, Freeland and Ambroise busily occupied with sums at the table, Mrs. Bray, the nice young person before mentioned, and the green-grocer, seated in a row, with their backs to the wall, rigidly demure and expectant.

"Is not Aunt Helwyse lovely?" Brigitte said, as she threw open the door, and, of course, there was a general burst of admiration, Helwyse good-naturedly turn-

ing round, walking to the door, and going through other performances to please the admiring spectators.

“Mr. Kingsbury sent the roses—where could he get them at this time of the year, I wonder?” Ambroise said, pointing to the exquisite roses Helwyse wore on her bosom and on her hair. “And the dress is copied from a portrait by an old master, and Mr. Kingsbury came this morning to give Brigitte orders, didn’t he, Brigitte?”

“Fetch my fan and gloves from upstairs, dear boy,” Helwyse said, anxious to change the conversation, and by the time Ambroise had returned, the carriage drove up, and to the infinite delight of several congregated maids-of-all-work and one or two policemen, Mrs. Cornwell, gorgeously dressed as Catharine of Braganza, and Mr. Kingsbury, superbly attired in a rich mediæval Venetian dress, himself “a por-

trait from an old master," also, alighted and ran up the steps.

"Another Munich portrait, you see," Kingsbury said, smilingly greeting Hellwyse, whilst Mrs. Cornwell, with great good-nature, displayed her splendour to the little assemblage. The velvet train, the satin petticoat, the gold ornaments, the diamonds, the feathers were too much for the green-grocer, who, though the meekest man alive, had as keen an eye for female charm as the gayest Lothario going.

"I'm sure, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Cornwell, "the wax beauties in Madame Tussaud's are nothing to you; and as to telling a carrot from a kidney bean at this moment, I could no more do it than if I'd been a-staring at the sun for hours with my eyelids cut off."

"A very nice compliment," said Mrs. Cornwell, who determined henceforth to

give all her custom to the humble shop round the corner.

Whilst this little comedy had been going on, Brigitte went up to Freeland, and whispered—

“Do not Aunt Helwyse and Mr. Kingsbury look beautiful standing together? It is like a picture.”

“Yes, indeed,” Freeland answered. But having already looked once, he could hardly bear to look again. What he had just seen was this—Helwyse was standing at the table, holding out one arm, while Kingsbury, bending down, re-clasped a bracelet which had become unfastened. As he did so, and only Freeland’s eyes noticed the act, he just touched the slender hand he held in his own with his lips. Then, looking up into her face, he whispered a word of apology, very sweet to hear, judging from the blush that followed.

"What are you thinking about, Mr. Freeland?" asked Ambroise, as soon as the dazzling company had gone. "You look quite glum. But now you will stay and have supper with us, won't you?"

"Not to-night, another time. I have work to do at home to-night."

"Oh! do stay," Brigitte said, entreatingly. "I have so much to say to you; and I promised Hilaire to go back the first thing in the morning. You must stay."

And, saying this, she playfully caught hold of one arm, Ambroise seized the other, and, thus lovingly made their prisoner, he was fain to consent.

The two children did the honours of their little banquet delightedly, too proud and happy to notice his abstraction. Brigitte had a thousand things to say, Ambroise a thousand questions to ask. Freeland could but listen and smile at this

merry prattle, for the moment forgetting his own thoughts.

But when once alone they would not go, and the next day and the next they clung to him, making his bread bitter, and the blessed light of Heaven almost a burden. Self-deluded fool that I have been, he reiterated to himself again and again, taking pleasure in reviewing his conduct, with ever-increasing rancour against himself, and a determination to be heroic in the future.

And about this time—that is to say, after the fancy ball—another rumour was bruited about, and another name coupled with that of the artist. It was no longer Lady Maud, the world said, to whom Mr. Kingsbury was making court, but Helwyse Fleming, that sweet rival, that lovely fellow-artist, whose fame and fortune promised some day to equal his own. Who could say that Helwyse and Kingsbury were not

exactly suited to each other?—not even Freeland, as he pondered over the news, feverishly restless, and alone. Outwardly nothing was changed. He saw as much of her as ever. She was as friendly to him as in former days, and the boy seemed to bring them nearer and nearer together. Yet, as he was constrained to believe in public report, he never for a moment forgot now that such apparent intimacy and equality were fictitious, and that, after all, he was as widely separated from Helwyse as if these new relations did not exist.

He remained the vigilant friend and devoted servant of old, not allowing these sorrowful convictions to stand between the allegiance he had sworn to his sweet mistress, not even permitting himself to be moody in her presence. Whatever bitterness his love for Helwyse might bring him, he determined

to bear unflinchingly and uncomplainingly. There was not a trace of sentimentalism, much less of over self-esteem or acerbity in his composition. He was, moreover, suffering no wrong, no injustice, no crushing evil report—why should he ask compassion or sympathy? His love was a thing that, so long as it did not concern Helwyse, concerned himself only, and he would never betray the precious secret to others by word, look, or deed.

Helwyse, happier, perhaps, than she had ever been throughout the course of her bright young life, knew nothing of Freedland's inward struggles. He was very good to her, very faithful, very devoted, and she showed her appreciation of such friendship in every way but the one he craved for. It was surely not her fault if she failed to discover the secret he had resolved so stoutly to conceal. She saw

him, busy as ever, interesting himself in his fellow-workmen, and in the boy, entering upon new paths of thought and study, step by step emancipating himself from the social shackles of his early life by little and little—and this, perhaps, by force of her own precedent and example—unobtrusively making for himself the position of which he was worthy. Seeing this, aiding, encouraging, sympathising with all her might, could she reproach herself for not doing more, for ill-requiting the services he rendered so unsparingly?

She had no means of knowing, except from himself, that he only cared to rise in the world, as the phrase runs, for her sake, that all her efforts on his behalf were vain, so long as she withheld the last pledge of equality he coveted in silence, the preference she was already said to have yielded to another.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

LIFE was very pleasant with Aunt Helwyse and Mr. Freeland, Ambroise thought. The boy possessed an artistic temperament, and that innate love of elegance and luxury which is so often found in conjunction with it. He adored Helwyse, more, perhaps, because she was lovely and gifted than anything else, and certainly his continued exemplary behaviour was more due to a dread of being sent back to Hornsey Rise than higher motives. "If we cannot get on happily

together," Helwyse had once said gravely, "there is no help for it but to separate, you know;" and that gentle threat acted like a bit and a bridle.

Ambroise contrasted the over-crowded little household at Uncle Bryan's, the frequent scoldings from Aunt Emmie, the perpetual consciousness of "being in the way," with his present condition, determined not to forfeit such good fortune by any fault of his own. Under Aunt Helwyse's roof, he was allowed to do very much as he liked when not at school or in Freeland's studio, and he enjoyed a dozen privileges and pleasures daily which did not fall to poor Patrice's share.

And the boy was old enough and clever enough to realise all the advantages of his social position. He knew as well as anybody could have told him, that, as

far as worldly and also intellectual good went, he was better off than his elder brother, and with natural self-complacence, felt that, in some way or other, he deserved the luck that had befallen him. Ambroise could not help knowing that Nature had endowed him more richly than Patrice. The two boys loved each other dearly, and Patrice, in his plodding way, would be sure to make a useful member of society by-and-by ; but he would never shine, and Ambroise felt sure of shining when his turn came. Thus by the nature of circumstances, the younger brother was led to entertain a feeling of superiority over the elder, and could not help showing it whenever they were together. As far as Helwyse and Freeland were concerned, they would fain have had their *protégé*, if not perfection, at least a credit to them-

selves, and spared no pains to make him what they wished him to be. As far as help of any kind went, Ambroise was better off than most human beings in the opening stages. He was surrounded by loveliness, moral, spiritual, and intellectual; all gross, much more alloyed influences, were kept out of his reach. His chief companions, indeed, were Free-land and Helwyse, and the strength of the one and sweetness of the other influenced the boy more than they knew. There was one quality Ambroise possessed in far less proportion than Brigitte and Patrice, namely, childish, outspoken ingenuousness, the element of caution, in fact, predominated a little too much. He was artificial in some respects.

“I think we shall make something of our boy,” Helwyse said to her fellow-tutor

one day. "He is already wonderfully improved in all ways."

"Yes, too much improved, I think," Freeland answered; then both smiled, understanding each other.

"He is sometimes so anxious to please that he loses naturalness. That will wear off in time."

"Oh! surely. And after all, a little affection is better than indifference. He is more head than heart just now; but the heart will grow bigger by-and-by."

"And Brigitte and Patrice are all heart! I cannot help wishing at times that it had been one of those two. But Ambroise has decided talents, and a good deal of ambition. He is sure to get on," Helwyse said.

"Oh! Miss Helwyse, what an expression for you to use!" Freeland cried, always

as frank to her as if it were Ambroise to whom he was speaking, always so utterly and entirely himself—Freeland, that, by comparison, other people, however ingenuous, seemed only half to reveal themselves, whether by word or deed. It was this uncommon sincerity, this transparent candour, this unalloyed unworldliness of Freeland's nature, that made intimacy so easy with him. Helwyse and Freeland, indeed, being now brought together by a mutually-shared care and responsibility, were as good friends as if they had been a ten-year-old boy and girl, comrades at the village school. Putting that deeper feeling out of the question, a feeling Freeland made a point of honour to conceal, there was nothing to mar a confidence and a friendship wholly above social inequalities now, and very rare among men and women in any condition.

When Freeland thus openly reproved her for her mundane phraseology, therefore, Helwyse coloured like a child under reproof, and hastened to explain herself.

“Of course, if Ambroise were differently situated, it would not be so; but as it is, how can I help thinking of what will become of him, if he does not ‘get on?’”

“The danger appears to me that he will get on only too well. I am far from sure”—and saying this, a smile, half tender, half searching, rippled the depths of his brown eyes as he gazed at her—“I am far from sure that we do not all ‘get on’ much too well, yourself among the number, Miss Helwyse.”

“Who can help delighting in success?” Helwyse answered gravely, not in the least offended by his words, feeling that in a measure they were true—“the spiritual side of it first, the material afterwards.

Could I go on painting if no one cared for my pictures? Can I refuse good fortune when it comes as a reward? I have always tried to carry out my ideas without thinking of those things, but I cannot help rejoicing when they come. Not to do so were Quixotic. What proofs have we of the excellence of creative work but acceptance and general liking?"

"Quite true," Freeland said, "and none of all your early admirers have rejoiced more over your success than I. But take care lest the spiritual gets finally shelved for the refined materialism that so nearly resembles it. It is by no means an easy thing to live in the world and yet keep unworldly."

"I own that I care much more for splendour than I used to do," Helwyse replied. "It would be very painful to me now to live surrounded by mean, vulgar,

or common things. I think every artist feels thus ; but surely I am not sinning her ?”

“ Oh, sinning is not the word, and I quite agree with you that every artistic mind feels the same craving. But there are limits to the indulgence of even an ennobling taste. For instance,” and here again Helwyse encountered those velvety eyes fixed searchingly on her. “ I am vexed when I hear of you dining at a duke’s house, dressed in white satin and feathers.”

Helwyse grew, on a sudden, red as a rose, and then laughed aloud—

“ Ah ! I see, Ambroise has been telling tales. But indeed and indeed, Mr. Freedland, I do not go out much into society. How could I work so persistently if I did ?”

“ How, indeed ! But I will tell you

what would happen. Your friends would go on flattering you ; you would gradually get into an affected mannerism ; whether you painted well or ill, you must wholly cease to be an artist in time, and become merely a very ornamental member of society," he said.

" That is the very opposite to what Mr. Kingsbury is always saying," Helwyse went on, not noticing the deep flush that mounted to Freeland's forehead. " There you have the consummate artist and the man of the world also ! And he says it must and should be so."

" Mr. Kingsbury is almost double your age, and earned his laurels long ago. Besides, excuse me for saying so, Miss Helwyse, I do not consider Mr. Kingsbury's judgments infallible in everything," Freeland said, suddenly grown curt and captious. Why was it that, whenever

Kingsbury's name was mentioned, all further conversation seemed impossible between them? Helwyse asked herself, not failing to notice his altered look and manner. She merely said, though there was something in her voice that jarred on his ear—

"Neither do I. But on all subjects Mr. Kingsbury's opinions are surely worthy of respect."

And thus, as had happened many a time before, whenever they began to talk of Mr. Kingsbury, their talking powers suddenly came to an end. Helwyse, seeing the artist's friendliness, nay, cordiality towards Freeland, could not at all account for such conduct, nor help blaming him for inconsistency sometimes. Want of generosity she could not attribute to him, yet she wondered at his unsympathetic attitude towards so early a friend and

liberal a patron. Mr. Kingsbury, indeed, more than anyone else, had helped to ensure Freeland's fortunes in the early part of his career. Yet could anyone say that Freeland was ungrateful?

It was not at all likely that Freeland should abate his zeal on Ambroise's behalf, or prove one whit less of a faithful knight to his liege lady, because Helwyse was said to be in love with another, and was undoubtedly living in a world apart from his own. If she wore a satin gown and dined in a palace every day, if she were going to marry a prince, he would still serve her faithfully with all the strength that was in him. So long as she needed his services they should be hers, and he would never forsake her till she cast him off, or needed him no longer. Moreover, in spite of public report and occasional intercourse with that rich, flat-

tering, self-centered society he held in such poor esteem, Helwyse was still the same to him: as good, as sweet, and, it is not necessary to say, as dear.' There were occasions when his devotion touched her deeply and made her wonder why he cared so much about her, why he was so ready to make sacrifices for her sake. For instance, one day when she came home after a three days' stay at Beechholme Park, she found that Ambroise had been suddenly transferred to his home. He had been ailing, Mrs. Bray said, and Mr. Freeland was so afraid lest he might be sickening of scarlatina, or some other infectious malady, that he had taken him away.

"You see, miss," she said, "it was you he was thinking of all the time. He would not write, as, when a child has the shivers and shakes, it may turn out nothing but worms after all; but it is best to be

careful, and I am sure, miss, if *you* caught anything, Mr. Freeland would go stark-staring mad."

And immediately after, Freeland came, saying with as much meekness as if he had been guilty of a crime—

"Miss Helwyse, please do not be angry with me. The doctor says it is the mildest possible form of scarlatina, and that the boy will be well in a week, but I entreat you not to come near him yet."

"You were quite right and very kind," Helwyse answered. "But I must, of course, go back with you at once. I promised to be a mother to the poor child, you know, and would his mother run away from fear?"

"But he is getting on nicely, and, I assure you, wants for nothing. I see him constantly," Freeland pleaded. He pleaded in vain; and for the next week or

two, Helwyse spent most of her time in Freeland's pretty little lodging. To please Ambroise, she consented to eat her meals there instead of returning home for them, so Freeland was seeing her, eating with her, drinking with her every day. He perpetually made excuses to go into the sick-room, if indeed sick-room it could be called, seeing how soon Ambroise recovered appetite and spirits, and he thought Helwyse had never looked so lovely as in that homely capacity of nurse. When she was out walking, it was his turn to pour out the medicine, tell stories, and otherwise divert the little invalid. And when Ambroise got well, and all fear of the malady spreading had passed away, Freeland and Helwyse could but feel better friends than ever. Another link was added to the chain of interchanged sympathies, another sense of nearness brought

them together, another memory was piled upon Freeland's accumulated stores. No wonder he felt rich alike in recollection and in hope.

Helwyse carried Ambroise off to the sea for a fortnight, and it was Freeland who arranged everything, Freeland who ran down to Bournemouth to engage lodgings, Freeland who accompanied them to the railway station. Truth to tell, all the rest of their friends were horribly afraid of catching the fever, and excepting Mr. Starffe, not one had even ventured to shake Helwyse by the hand during the last few weeks. What else could she expect under the circumstances? Yet it made her none the less appreciative of the friendship that towered above such considerations as snow-tipped, sky-kissing mountains above the work-a-day world.

CHAPTER VIII.

“PURPLE AND FINE LINEN.”

WHILST it was in the work-a-day world of homely joys and sorrows, of common duties and humble aspirations, that Helwyse held daily converse with Freeland, it was solely among the wearers of purple and fine linen, and on sunshine holidays, that she encountered Kingsbury. The artist, now in the zenith of his reputation, and whose life might be compared to a royal progress, since he was fêted, flattered, and adored wherever he went, was not content to leave his sweet pupil the wild flower he had found her. Hel-

wyse was lovely and gracious in his eye ; he sometimes thought her nearly perfect, and he was always bent upon making her so. To him the very candour, naïveté and freshness of the young Irish girl were not exactly faults, that were too strong a word, but certainly points to be improved upon. Daisies and primroses, however delicious in country hedges, become by comparison insignificant when transported to London drawing-rooms, and Mr. Kingsbury wanted to turn his particular daisy into an exotic. Why should not Helwyse shine in society as well as women possessed of half her beauty, and none of her natural endowments ? He did all in his power to further her artistic education, and was delighted when her pictures won general praise ; but he was naturally much more interested in the artist than in the work, in the aspirant rather than the thing she achieved. He cer-

tainly would not have liked to marry a rival; but Helwyse would never be that, and he had long made up his mind that the man who marries an inferior is a fool. There were things Helwyse did not possess he should have liked well enough, namely, inherited rank and prestige, a few acres of land with title deeds five hundred years old, an aristocratic name, and so on. But in choosing a wife, one must be resigned to a large amount of renunciation, and he could not give up beauty and mental gifts, whatever else had to be sacrificed. It must not be supposed that he had as yet made up his mind upon so important a question as marriage. When a man has reached forty without being able to decide upon that question, he is pretty sure to go on wavering a little longer. Kingsbury felt, as he looked in the glass, that there was yet time, and if the truth were plainly stated,

perhaps he was trying with all his might to choose between the Lady Maud, whose name has been already mentioned—a handsome, high-spirited girl, with a long pedigree, and who, being unmarried at the age of twenty-five, and the elder of five sisters, felt it high time to turn to literature and aesthetics by way of a career—and sweet Helwyse Fleming, who had inherited nothing but loveliness and genius, and already at twenty-three, had all her future before her. Whilst, therefore, such a struggle was going on in the artist's mind and fancy, it was only likely that he should try to make Helwyse as near like his ideal as possible. He could not marry a girl whose habits of life, acquaintances and dress, were not in accordance with his views; and he often found himself wishing that she would give up travelling in omnibuses, select her friends with more regard to rank and position, and patronise a court

milliner. He wished, too, that she had no relations. Still the little nephew, being trained for an artisan, and the brother, who was a clerk in the city, could not be got rid of, and he admitted that so far she had showed docility under his guidance with regard to other matters. She accepted invitations at great houses, more to please him than from any other motive, was as much gratified when he praised a new gown as if it were a new picture, and because he so often expressed a love of splendid clothes, spent twice as much time and money about her dress as formerly. The results were still very modest, he even found her attire simple to rusticity on occasions ; but a step had been made in the right direction. He noticed with pleasure that she no longer wore cotton dresses and straw hats in London streets, paid formal visits in a brougham, and wore her hair dressed very nearly like Lady Maud's.

Let no one blame Helwyse for this harmless coquetry. She must have been more than human not to feel flattered by the artist's interest and admiration. He was never known to have admired a woman artist before, and she felt sure that the homage paid to her as such was sincere—sweetest homage conceivable to an ardent, enthusiastic girl like Helwyse. She possessed, in common with the Hypatias, Corinnes, and Angelica Kaufmanns of history, all the gentle characteristics of her sex, combined with the tenacity of purpose and the power of will exhibited in the other. That slender, fair-haired girl, with her sweet eyes—Irish, blue-black eyes, shaded by long dark eyelashes!—whilst a true woman, ready to sacrifice everything if necessary to womanly duty, had as strong a determination as Kingsbury himself to realise those higher

aspirations with which sex has nothing to do. She was just as capable as he of persistent self-forgetting, self-confident devotion to art, and just as sure that, by dint of learning, toil, and thought, she should arrive at artistic completeness some day. Having, therefore, these dreams, hopes, and aspirations, it was no wonder that she clung to the one friend and authority whose smile of approbation went farther with her than that of all the rest put together. When Kingsbury praised her work she was happy, when he found fault with it, hardly less so, because she felt sure of pleasing him on the morrow. He perpetually held before her a standard, which, with his help, she felt sure of reaching some day, and his unvarying interest in her progress was indeed flattery of the most precious kind.

There was, therefore, every reason why

she should try to raise not only her work but her life, in Kingsbury's estimation. She wanted to fashion it exactly according to his favourite pattern, to satisfy him in small matters as well as great. Intellectually, she sat at his feet, his powerful delineations, abundant fancy, and classic taste, alternately delighting and discouraging her, whilst naturally his wide reputation and richly largessed achievements dazzled her fancy, and made him appear greater than he was. A man who has reached the pinnacle of reputation at forty-two, and goes on winning fresh laurels every year, is already immortal in the eyes of his personal admirers, and Helwyse had ranked Kingsbury with Peter Paul Rubens and Sir Joshua long ago, sometimes even with Titian and Tintoretto.

“You praise me too highly,” the artist would say. Yet the homage of the sweet

girl artist could but be very grateful to him. He often asked himself if the freshness and ingenuousness he sometimes wished to get rid of did not form the chief beauty of her character; yet, because he fancied himself in love with her, and wanted his wife to be perfect before the eyes of the world, she must lose all these and know how to preside over a drawing-room like an ordinary woman.

“My dear Helwyse,” Mrs. Cornwell said one day, when the two were enjoying afternoon tea and confidential chat, “will you let me talk to you about Mr. Kingsbury?”

“Oh, what have we to say about Mr. Kingsbury?” Helwyse answered, blushing crimson.

“You can keep silent; but I shall be very glad if you will listen to me for a few minutes. I am so much older, and so much more worldly than you, my dear.”

" You are in some respects the most unworldly person I know!" Helwyse said simply.

" That may be—you see I was brought up in a country parsonage, with an allowance of ten pounds a year for my clothes, and myself, one out of six sisters, all reared upon a hundred and fifty pounds a year. I might very pardonably have thought too much of money after such a bringing up! But since my marriage I have always lived among worldly people—good people enough, but worldly—my dear, and so I have learnt their ways, and have grown in some things very wise. Now I am not going to take for granted that you are in love with Mr. Kingsbury, or that he is in love with you. I will only suppose such a state of things, and I am sure neither your friends nor his could wish you both better fortune. Supposing, then, that this were

the case, permit me to say, I think you are acting against your own interests."

Helwyse said nothing; but Mrs. Cornwell was too old and too true a friend to give offence, whatever she might say. So she let her go on.

"It is all very well, my dear child, for a woman to stand by her family, and no man worth a straw could wish otherwise. I am sure Mr. Cornwell has been a father to my younger sisters, and only last month gave the youngest her marriage outfit! and sent her to the Himalayas, because there was no chance of marrying her here! But there is a limit to everything, there is a time when a girl should begin to think of herself, and I consider you are decidedly wrong in putting family considerations before anything just now."

"How have I done that?" asked Helwyse. She was always, on the contrary, reproaching herself that she did not spend

more time and money on poor Patrick's children.

"Well, there's Ambroise, for instance. He is a nice boy and a clever boy, and, I am sure, will be a credit to you all some day. But is it quite judicious to bring him up in the way you are doing, without any reference, in fact, to the prejudices of the world?"

"Could I find anywhere a better friend and companion for him than Mr. Freedland?" Helwyse said, with some temper in spite of herself.

"I do not say that you could; but, you know, it is a narrow-minded world we live in at best, and whilst there are accepted ranks and conditions of society, we are bound to consider them. I think, seeing how marked Mr. Kingsbury's liking is for you, you should not do anything to wound his sensibilities on that point, but rather

seek to humour them; that is to say, if the liking is mutual."

"Surely not at the expense of good feeling and good sense? I cannot teach Ambroise to regard Mr. Freeland as his inferior. The boy will have to work for his living by-and-by, and the sooner he begins to realize his true position, and to set up Mr. Freeland as a model, the better," and again Helwyse spoke warmly.

"Quite true, my dear. I know that you are in the right, and that we are all in the wrong; when we find a really noble character, we ought to set all mean considerations of social position aside, but who does this? What is equality but a name to nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand? Still without neglecting our duties, and without going directly against general opinion, there is a middle course. We must compromise. That

is what we must do. We must keep our notions on equality in the background, and our poor relations too. No man likes to marry a woman with poor relations."

" You would not surely have me send Ambroise back?"

" No, not exactly. But I should make it understood that he was only with you conditionally, and that you were not bound to do anything for the others. Why did you ever tell Mr. Kingsbury about the arrival of the orphans at all?"

" Because I looked upon him as my friend," Helwyse answered, her eyes filling as she spoke. She could not believe what Mrs. Cornwell's words implied.

" Which I am sure he is—yet it was injudicious. Excuse me for saying so, my dear, it was undoubtedly injudicious. We must take human nature for what it

is, and it is not fond of legacies in the shape of orphan children. We must remember, too, that there is no point on which a proud man is more sensitive than the position of his wife's family. I wish your brother were not a clerk in the City, with all my heart."

"So do I, for Bryan's sake."

"And I wish we could get Ambroise a nomination in one of the public schools. Shall I ask Frederick to try his interest for the Charter House?"

"Indeed, it is quite settled that he is to follow Mr. Freeland's calling, thank you, dear Mrs. Cornwell. The Charter House is out of the question. He would want to go to one of the universities after," Helwyse said, smiling, as she thought with what complacency Ambroise would have entertained the proposal.

"And what about that clever, handsome

wilful Brigitte ? Don't let her go out as a governess or study for the stage. If Mr. Papillon adopts her, let him send her to a fashionable school, like any other young lady, and marry her, if he likes, afterwards. Pray understand what I mean," her friend went on, "I am only thinking of yourself when I say all this. I do very much want you to marry exactly the right person, and it makes me uneasy when I see you throwing obstacles in the way. Think just a little more of appearances and *les convenances*, that is all. Don't let Ambroise do the kind of work that requires an apron ; prepare him for the Civil Service or the Navy ; keep the others well in the background, and do, in Heaven's name, my dear, spend a little more time and thought about your dress. And then, you must allow me to say a word about choosing your acquaintances. I

don't think you have nearly ambition enough in that direction. Why, with your gifts and growing reputation, you might make quite a success in society, if you would only lay yourself out to please."

"I have plenty of friends," Helwyse answered, amused, and yet not a little vexed. "But what you call 'a success in society' has never entered into my calculations. I would much rather go back to my village home in Ireland than live in London on those conditions."

"Then you are unreasonable. Just consider the matter from a common-sense point of view. You and I may have very different ideas about good company, so called ; but everyone knows what the world means by it, and what store the world sets by it. You may be bored to death by a crush at a great house, for example, may have spent an extravagant sum upon

your dress for the occasion, and may come home disgusted at the results. But the mere fact of being seen there is good for you. People will think better of you for figuring among dukes and duchesses. If you have been conducted to your carriage by a titled personage, you will be considered a more original artist ever after. The more powdered footmen who rap at your door the better, and if you can once scrape acquaintance with a bishop, your fortune is made. I do not say that this is just as it should be. I only say that all the talking in the world will not make it otherwise."

Helwyse listened in silence, her face gradually changing from bewilderment to an expression of pain. What did her friend's words mean but this:—you must relinquish your free, happy, natural existence, you must cut your daily life, wishes

and aspirations, to the ordinary pattern, you must give up alike homely pleasures and common duties, and all because usage and prejudice bid you, because society holds out a fictitious good to you, and, like the rest of the world, you are willing to be cheated. No, she said to herself, she would go on as she had begun. She would never shut her eyes to the true beauty and the true joy of life, would never set worldly good above friendship, much less love. She could not and would not believe that love, if, indeed, worthy of the name, concerned itself with these things.

"I cannot live two lives," she said, "the one lovely to me, the other burdensome. Up to the present time everything has helped me as an artist. I have had just enough encouragement, and not too much disappointment. Had I been born in a higher rank of life, or had I been rich to

begin with, how many obstacles would have come in the way ! and all these I should be creating now, were I once to begin following the course you propose.” She smiled, and added, “ Take the subject of dress, for instance. You consider me incorrigible on that point, I know. But, dear friend, if I gave up my mind to tucks and flounces, what time would be left for other things ? I am a country girl, used to wear cotton gowns and straw hats. Why insist on turning me into a fashionable lady ?”

“ There is a middle course, my dear—a middle course that every proper-minded woman is bound to follow. In other words, she must always appear in society well dressed. Do let me send my dressmaker to you before you accept any more invitations.”

“ No,” Helwyse said, shaking her head demurely. “ If your dressmaker once

crosses my threshold, I shall have to admit the milliner, and a dozen others as well. I must just remain as I am."

And saying this, she kissed her friend, and putting on her hat and waterproof cloak, hastened home in the wintry twilight, pondering on all that had been said.

It set her thinking, but it did not in the least cause her to waver in her resolve. She would go on as she had begun, serving her heart first, and the world afterwards, and, above all, never neglecting those duties which stood before all. She smiled as she recalled her friend's wish concerning Bryan and the children. What mattered it to others whether Bryan was a clerk in the City, or not? Who could love Ambroise the less for wearing an apron? And as to herself, should she not surely sink rather than rise in the estimation of her true friends, if once she began affecting to

be that she was not? And Mr. Kingsbury! Could outward circumstances make any difference to him? But she would not let her mind dwell on that thought. She felt sure that he would be her friend always, and, having come to this conclusion, sat down to the modest little tea-table with an unclouded face. When next time Freeland came to give Ambroise his mathematical lesson, she invited him to supper no less cordially than usual, and she bought no more new dresses, in spite of all that Mrs. Cornwell could say. Nothing, she said, should divide her from so faithful a friend as Freeland, and nothing should induce her to lead an artificial life.

Thus the winter passed, with constant intercourse between the artist and his fair young rival, with ever-growing passion on Freeland's part, and deepening friendship on Helwyse's, whilst all the time a

delicious dream, in which he had no part, made her life brighter than before.

And meantime, none knew how the rumour first arose, it was in everyone's mouth now, that Edward Kingsbury was paying court to Helwyse Fleming.

CHAPTER IX.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

TWO years and more have passed since that summer night when Brigitte and her brothers presented themselves at their uncle's door demanding shelter, and only ordinary joys and cares make up the milestones that mark the way. Outwardly, little had changed in the household at Hornsey Rise, except that Bridget, as she was now called, all the children being in Emilia's language made English at last, was almost a woman, Patrick's education was nearly finished, and the younger children had grown tall, and, to use Emilia's homely

expression, “ruinous.” In fact, the battalion of little ones was fast being drafted into the category of their elders, a trying period of transition, as all anxious mothers know. Little ones can be put to bed early, can be clothed with their mother’s gowns and their father’s pantaloons ; but when once the process of growing up has set in, feeding and clothing a large family upon the narrowest of narrow means is a terrible business.

Patrick, being tall enough for a grenadier, could not be treated like a baby any longer ; Kathleen, jealous of prerogative, insisted upon the like promotion, Margie put on consequential airs ; of the formidable seven only Hilary and Norah really remained children. Contrive as she would, and in spite of occasional helps from that benevolent and mysterious “friend in the City,” to whom poor Bryan was obliged to

have recourse when quarter-day came round, Emilia found her task more difficult than ever. Once or twice, seeing how things stood, Bridget had offered in desperation to go out as a pupil-teacher, but Emilia refused for her own sake as much as Hilary's now. The poor little lad had not flourished under the cold grey English skies, and at times looked so fragile that it would have required a stouter heart than Emilia's to send Bridget away. The family doctor would shake his head and say, "Take him to the sea in November;" but when medicines and necessary nourishments were barely to be had, how could sea-side trips be thought of?

Then, of course, came one of those occasional spells of family illness which are sure to happen some time or other, and even when productive of no fatal results, entail anxieties, trouble, and cost for months to come. Patrick sickened of

infectious fever, one child after another caught the malady ; the trusty Bridget was laid on a sick-bed, and what with care and anxiety, Emilia herself fell ill as soon as the children recovered. None of them were very dangerously ill, but convalescence had to be followed by the usual costly processes of a lengthy disinfection and a general move to the sea. They came back, all looking fresh and invigorated, Bryan having had naturally to furnish a good round sum for paying sea-side lodgings, not to speak of other expenses.

They returned in September, only Hilary bearing a trace of past illness. He had grown so fast whilst away that he was hardly recognizable ; but as soon as the ruddiness and roundness were gone, Bridget noticed how thin he was, how pallid at times, and a terrible fear took possession of her. What could she do for

her darling? How could she earn money to procure him the further change of air he needed?

She mooted the subject to Aunt Emmie, choosing, in her impetuosity, an unpropitious moment.

"Dear auntie," she said, "the cod-liver oil doesn't seem to do Hilary any good since the autumn set in. Do you think Uncle Bryan would let him go to the seaside again for a month?"

"Bridget, just think of what you are asking! You are surely old enough to see that both your uncle and I are worried about expenses as it is. We have done our utmost for Hilary, but we are not made of money, and we shall have to pinch and screw for months to come to make up for past expenses."

Bridget sat still with filling eyes and trembling lips.

"I know it, Aunt Emmie," she answered, "but I cannot sleep at nights for thinking of Hilary's looks. I am tall and grown-up-looking now," she added, with a change of voice. "Might not that lady at Stoke Newington employ me as a daily governess? Then I could find the money to send Hilary away."

"Who could take him?" Emmie said, growing more and more impatient. "No, Bridget, we can but do our best; it is useless catching at shadows. Go to see Mrs. Smith, by all means, and if she engages you well and good. But as to Hilary going to the sea——"

"That kind landlady, Mrs. Jones, would look after him, and Bournemouth is just the place. If Mrs. Smith does employ me, may I spend my money as I like, Aunt Emmie—at least, a part of it?"

"Certainly. And mind and make her

give you your dinners, if you go for the whole day, or you will be getting ill too," Emilia added.

Bridget put on her bonnet and cloak and set off for Stoke Newington with a heart full of hope. Her proposal to gain money by assisting at Penny Readings had been coldly negatived long ago, and what with one thing and another, poor Bridget felt that she was regarded as a chimerical, unpractical person at best. But to teach French at Mrs. Smith's seemed eminently practical, and as she crossed One Tree Hill, now brown, misty, melancholy, and walked along the wooded banks of the winding canal, her young brain was busy on a thousand schemes. She would mention to the schoolmistress her reasons for wanting money at once, perhaps she would even pay a little in advance, thought Bridget, on a sudden turned mercenary and calcul-

lating, or she would, at least, consent to monthly payments. It was still early in September, some weeks intervened before the period suggested by the doctor for Hilary's departure; meantime she might surely be able to raise funds; she would advertise in *The Hornsey Gazette* for additional pupils at their own houses, and leave no stone unturned to earn the money necessary. Hilary would have to go without her, but she could join him in the holidays, and how small any sacrifice in comparison with his health!

So far Bridget was not over speculative, and the hopefulness imparted by her plans lent nimbleness to that tall, girlish figure, irradiated her face, so childish still, in spite of added beauty and added care. With her wild, curly, black hair hanging in childish fashion on her shoulders, her unfashionable print gown, so short in the

skirt and scanty in the cape, the young girl as she walked along, looked the personification of strength, hope and symmetry. There was grace in every limb, music in every movement, the grace engendered of a rare physical development, undeteriorated by fashionable dress or artificial habits of life. Bridget Fleming recalled those noble Breton peasant women, descendants of the Druidesses of old, still encountered in remote spots of the ancient Armorica, whose dignity of bearing and superb looks are but increased by their mediæval costumes and childish simplicity of manner.

The girl walked swiftly, yet by force of habit stopped before the well known stone in the old-world church of Stoke Newington, bearing the name of *Letitia Barbauld*.

“How pleasant to be born a genius like Mrs. Barbauld!” she thought, as she

gazed wistfully. “If I could only write a book like *Evenings at Home*, now, how much easier it would be to send Hilary to sea than by giving French lessons.”

Then she wondered if Mrs. Barbauld had written *Evenings at Home* in order to send a little sick brother to the sea.

In these northern suburbs there are still spots almost as rustic and unchanged as if London lay hundreds of miles away. The sound of the railway whistle and the builder’s mallet has, it is true, intruded into the very heart of those rural retreats so dear to our grandfathers, but here and there you may even yet fancy yourself in some quaint Kentish or Suffolk market-town. Solid red brick mansions of Queen Anne’s time rise amid orchards and gardens where the thrushes and the blackbirds build still, and the Sweet-Williams and gilly-flowers

flourish as in the olden time. Moss-grown walls shut in antiquated parterres, and when a side-door opens, some old-fashioned lady or gentleman appears who we fancy must have been a contemporary of Mrs. Barbauld. Fashion is yet leagues removed from such tranquil haunts, and people here know their next door neighbours as in country villages. The family doctor enlivens his patients with a little scandal, and acquaintances gossip about each other's affairs as if they were living in Cranbrook or Framlingham.

Bridget's errand, as might have been expected, was unsuccessful. The autumn term had begun, no new arrangements could be made until Christmas, after that time, the schoolmistress said, she might call again. With a sad face and a heavy step, the girl set out on her long walk homeward, cast down but determined to persevere. The next day,

having obtained Emilia's consent, she broke open her money-box and took out the five shillings, three threepenny-pieces, and odd pence that constituted her sole capital, and again hopeful and eager, took the following advertisement to *The Hornsey Gazette*—“French lessons, for a shilling an hour, given by a young lady brought up in France. Address B. at the office.”

But French teachers must be as plentiful as blackbirds, judging from the cold response made to poor Bridget's offer. When almost all her savings were expended on advertisements, she had only received one answer, and as it came from the baker's assistant over the way, of course Aunt Emmie objected.

“I wish Aunt Helwyse would come back from Florence,” thought poor Bridget. “She could, perhaps, advise me what to do.”

She was resolved more than ever now to sacrifice herself for Hilary ; and happening one day to glance at Papillon's name and address written in her little missal, a fresh gleam of hope flashed across her mind. If everything else failed, if neither Aunt Helwyse nor Mrs. Smith came by-and-by to the rescue, she would go to Papillon. "If ever you want a friend you will find one in Hubert Papillon," he had said, and she felt sure that she might rely on the words. Two years had elapsed since those happy days at Beechholme Park, and they had never met since the parting at King's Cross. She smiled now as she recalled the comical incidents attending that third-class journey, and conjured up Papillon's look of martyrdom as he eagerly caught at her scent-bottle and emptied her eau-de-Cologne on his head. Surely he had not forgotten her ! With the keen, unforget-

ting memory of early youth, she recalled every circumstance connected with Papillon at Beechholme Park: the woodland rambles they had taken together, the arithmetic lessons in the library, the tea-drinking at Freeland's lodgings. Yes, mused poor Bridget, I never was so happy in my life as when I was with Mr. Papillon. How good-natured he was ! How kind of him to send Hilary that little blue coat, and to teach me sums and spelling ! He cannot have forgotten me so soon !

Poor Bridget little thought how short-memoried are those who live in the world, and nothing would have persuaded her that whilst in her own mind every incident of those blissful autumn weeks was as fresh as if it had happened yesterday, from his the whole might be utterly blotted out. Would youth be youth if it did not believe in the wished-for always ! I take

it, the boundary mark of youth ends and age begins when once we cease to realize sweet possibilities, living rapturously upon them, desiring no other evidence that a thing exists than our own faith in such existence.

October came goldenly, and Hilary so brightened under the influences of a long Indian summer that, for a time, Bridget's apprehensions concerning him were set at rest. All the hills were now bathed in subdued sunshine, and the mellowing woods on Highgate Hill stood out, amber coloured and lustrous, against a tender sky. Just enough rain had fallen to keep the pastures green, whilst the ripe red chestnuts dropped with a crisp sound on the bronze-coloured fern leaves, and the wrens sang in the hedges. There were, as yet, no pools in those little woodland glades where, in summer-time, the children had made daisy

chains, and where they could now find the last blossom of Traveller's Joy or wild honeysuckle, as they safely lingered about the mossy banks, dry, soft, and warm as Persian carpets. The days drew in early, but were delicious whilst they lasted, and, excepting for the vineyards and the mountains, Bridget could have fancied herself in her native Dauphiné.

And Mr. Starffe—who, for benevolent reasons, had given up his country trip—this year gave his little friends half-holiday treats.

“I enjoy the sea-side as much as anyone,” he had said apologetically to inquiring parishioners, “but all the more when I get it seldom. Too much self-indulgence, you know, is good for no one.”

So in order to help a needy sister with a family of nine children, whose husband was a poor curate like himself, Mr. Starffe

had relinquished his annual trip, and, as he put it, “was running about a little nearer town instead.”

One day he took Patrick to twice-renowned Edmonton, where, after strolling through the rustic churchyard and looking at Charles Lamb’s humble grave, they took tea in the smoky, dingy little inn immortalized in *John Gilpin*. It must be confessed that the *Old Bell* is not a romantic place. The refreshments offered in its historic parlour are not nectar and ambrosia, whilst little picturesqueness lingers round the level landscapes Lamb loved so well. But the mere fact of being in an inn, whether we take our ease there or not, imparts a mild hilarity to the unfrequent traveller. The sense of the bustle and cosmopolitanism with which we are surrounded, the strangers that go and come during our stay, even the pictures

on the wall, have a weird fascination for us. We feel almost as far from home as if we were crossing the Himalayas, or eating cous-cous-sou with Bedouins of the Sahara.

“How delightful it is to travel with a well-stored mind,” said the curate, as he poured out the tea. “How much more delightful to pass away and leave undying memories behind us! If Edmonton were buried by an earthquake to-morrow, *John Gilpin* and *Elia* would remain enshrined for ever in the memories of man!”

“Yes, sir,” answered Patrick, who was very hungry, and thought the ham excellent. “I hope you are enjoying yourself as much as I am.”

“With the inner man, my lad, yes. But neither will I deny that I find our simple fare appetizing. Suppose you ring for more buttered toast?”

Patrick jumped up with an alacrity not

excessive considering the length of their walk, and they returned home charmed with everything—except the bill. High prices have even found their way to old-world Edmonton.

Still Mr. Starffe's ardour was not damped, and upon another occasion he took Bridget and the younger ones to High Barnet, where, after a long ramble across the fields and breezy bits of broken common, they regaled at a little wayside inn, with a farmhouse look and an antiquated homeliness about it still to be found in those parts.

Happy the man or woman who can thus find his bosom friends among little children ! Mr. Starffe's life was eminently a hard one. He had to help poor relations, to keep up a decent appearance, dispense a little charity, and provide for old age, and all this on a hundred pounds a year !

His work lay among the poorest of the poor, his ministrations among the ignorant, the thankless, and often the degraded and the unhappy. None of the gratifications and flatteries usually heaped on bachelor curatedom fell to his share. When he suffered from a sore throat he had to buy blackcurrant jelly, and when one pair of slippers was worn out another must be purchased. No sentimental hearers of the fair sex hung upon his words or wore his portrait secretly next their hearts. He lived very much alone in his little lodging over the greengrocer's, dining solemnly once a year at the Rector's, dropping into supper after friendly fashion with Bryan and Miss Wren, paying a rare visit to Helwyse, and that was all. Yet Mr. Starffe was content, and in his pious prayers never omitted to thank God for the blessings he enjoyed. Not the least

of these were the love and confidence of the little ones among his flock. He looked forward to his children's service once a month as much as they, and never met a young hearer, no matter whether rich or poor, without almost an apostolic smile irradiating his pale features. So, whenever he devoted half a holiday to the little Flemings, it was a real pleasure to himself, and each whispered confidences into his ear by turns. He was alike the confessor, the comforter, the friend of all, and by virtue of what? Not, certainly, of winning manner, grace, or wit, much less of liberal largess or other worldly bribes, simply because he loved them, and they knew it, simply because, like Nathaniel, "he was a man in whom there was no guile."

These glimpses of tranquillity at home and rural enjoyment abroad were not, however, of long duration. On a sud-

den, winter sent in with hurricane after hurricane of wind and rain, and on a sudden, the domestic horizon at Hornsey Rise clouded also.

CHAPTER X.

BRYAN UNBOSOMS HIMSELF.

FOR some time past, the curate had noticed that Bryan was growing very unlike the Bryan of former days. Once Mr. Starffe had no parishioner so regular in his attendance at church and so sociable during the week as he; the two men, though as unlike each other as could possibly be, both in temperament, ways of thinking, and character, were on the friendliest terms, and a week had never elapsed without a long talk and a cigar smoked in company. But of late Bryan had come seldom, and

for weeks would stay away altogether. He did not always accompany Emilia and the children to church now, and was the dullest companion in the world on a country walk. Naturally light-hearted, vivacious, and fond of society, Bryan had been a general favourite with young and old. He was ever ready for a song, a dance, or amusement in any shape, and certainly made the best of that City life he was in the habit of describing so lugubriously. What was the reason of the change so apparent to all? His brow was overcast, the muscles of his face drawn down, his step heavy, and white hairs began to make their appearance in his brown curls. Mr. Starffe thought he knew. Those expensive family illnesses, those flittings to the sea, those additional outlays upon Patrick's education and apprenticeship were not to be easily met by the clerk's narrow

resources. It was without doubt want of money that wrinkled his brow, whitened his hair, and made him so different from his former self. And all Bryan's intimate friends had realized in one way or another the impracticable side of Emilia's nature in the matter of these orphan children. She was a good wife, an admirable mother, but a little headstrong when her own children were concerned, and, as has been seen, a little jealous of what she would sometimes vaguely call their rights. Thus they naturally imputed some of the added cares to her mismanagement of affairs.

One evening, just as Mr. Starffe was saying grace before his frugal supper, Bryan came in, looking so haggard that the curate thought some evil must have happened to Helwyse. She had been travelling in Italy and Switzerland for months past, and no one knew exactly where she was at that moment, the wintry

part of autumn had set in, and there were always risks to be run when away from home.

“ My dear sir, what is the matter? I trust you have no bad news of Miss Helwyse?” he added, holding out a chair, into which Bryan dropped with the air of a sick man.

“ No, indeed ; we have no news of her at all, and I am thankful she is away just now.” Then he blurted forth, with his eyes cast on the ground, and a flush mounting to his pale cheeks. “ The fact is, my wife and I are in trouble about money matters.”

“ Oh dear ! how sorry I am ! What can I do for you ?” said the curate. “ I am sure I need not say that what little money I have in the house is at your disposal. It is so little as to be hardly worth mentioning ; but I can get at a trifle more in the bank.”

"You are very kind," Bryan said, shaking the friendly hand held out to him; "but it is another kind of help I have come to ask you."

"You look so ill and tired, and I am sorry I have not a drop of wine in the house! It is better to keep temptation out of the way, you know; but could you not eat a bit of supper before going on?"

"I cannot eat, thank you," Bryan replied.

"Nonsense! Nothing unmans a fellow like a long fast. Just a crust of bread and cheese and a glass of ale? Come now, I insist upon it, and if you refuse I shall consider that you slight my pastoral authority."

And what with banter and scolding, at last the curate got his way, and poor Bryan ate, drank, and certainly felt better. Then Mr. Starffe, who, under that gaunt,

rough exterior, hid the tenderness and motherliness of a good woman, stirred the fire into a blaze, drew his arm-chair before it, and put the usual well-filled pipe into Bryan's hand, saying,

"Now smoke away, and tell me what it is that an old friend can do for you. God never sent us into the world to be miserable, my good friend, depend on that. The happier we are in an honest, straightforward way the better He is pleased, and so let us try to make the best of your troubles, and help you out of them as quickly as possible."

"I will tell you how they began," Bryan said, feeling cheered in spite of himself. "You know we were not too well off when poor Patrick's children came, and we did not manage well to begin with. Emmie—as was natural, poor thing—regarded Bridget and the boy as intruders. Patrick

was not her brother, she never even saw him, so that it was not likely she should feel towards them as Helwyse and I do. We ought to have acted very differently from the first, I know, and it was my fault that I did not insist upon it at the time; but Emmie would not hear of taking the children from school, moving into lodgings, and other little economies. ‘Let Bridget go out, and then Kathie and Margie shall be sacrificed, but not before,’ she said, and so it was with one thing after another, and what was left but to get into debt? Helwyse took Ambrose away; but there were all kinds of extra expenses; the little lad, Hilary, was always falling ill, Patrick had to be put to school and now apprenticed; I had a heavy life assurance to pay up, and, you know, last spring we had doctors and nurses in the house for two months, and a general move to the sea to wind up

with. I had never outrun my income in former years, I always said I would emigrate to Australia first, and that would, perhaps, have been the best thing to do ; but we stayed here, and began by letting the tradesmen wait."

" True, true ; you were most painfully situated, and I for one will not be hard on you, Fleming," the curate said encouragingly, as he heaped more coals on the fire. " Pray unbosom yourself, my dear friend, and I will afford whatever help and consolation I can, both as a friend and a minister of religion."

" How foolish, how confoundedly——"

" Come, come, my dear sir——"

" How unaccountably, unmitigatedly, confoundedly, I beg your pardon, I mean out and out, foolish it was not to see what would come," Bryan went on. " Of course we might have lived within our income had we tried. How many much

larger families live decently on smaller means! Well, you know what tradesmen's little bills are. They had to be paid, sharp, too, and to do that, and avoid all kinds of worrying and harassing, I—borrowed some money."

"Dear, dear," the curate said. "Dear me!"

"First of some one I knew, not a friend exactly, but an acquaintance, but he also, like the tradesmen, had to be paid at last, and where to get the money I did not know. It had grown from twenty pounds into a large sum, a very large sum indeed for a poor man like me, two hundred and thirty in all, and what with interest——"

"Bless my soul!" cried poor Mr. Starffe, looking horrified.

"What could I do but go straight and jump into the devil's mouth?" Bryan said, not heeding the curate's remonstrating pat-

on the shoulder. “Brown, the man who had lent me the money, a good fellow enough, was going into business, he said, and he was obliged to have it without delay. And so I got it of a money-lender.”

“Oh, my dear friend, why did you not ask somebody’s advice, why did you not write to your sister? Why did you not——”

“Helwyse knows nothing about it, and if she had been at home, I think I should never have had the courage to tell her. You see, it is so entirely my own fault, and she has already done her share by providing for Ambrose. Besides, poor Helwyse has not a penny that she has not worked for, and it would be mean and cowardly to rob her of her little savings. I must get someone else to help me. All I want is a little time.”

“Well, they will surely give you that. Shall I call on them and try what my

poor persuasions will do?" asked the curate.

"If you would! That is exactly what I was going to beg of you," Bryan said, gratefully. "You see, a clergyman will be listened to before anyone else. You know me so well, you are quite sure, are you not, that I am neither a cheat nor a scoundrel?"

"Of course, of course. They don't believe that, do they?"

"They behave as if they did," Bryan said, looking the very personification of wretchedness as he got out the words. "They threaten me, if the money is not paid by to-morrow night, to——"

"Well, what can [they do? They can't put you in prison, can they?"

"But they can turn me out of house and home. They can put an execution in the house, which means selling the very beds from under the poor children."

“Good Heavens!” cried the curate, turning very pale. “I will go the very first thing to-morrow morning and see if a little time can be obtained, I will take what little money I have with me as a stop-gap. And don’t you think I had better speak to our rector? He is a family man, and has a kind heart, and he is rich compared with myself. Perhaps he would lend you the money for a time.”

“No, do not say a word to Mr. Leslie,” Bryan said, “I will speak to my employers. I will try to raise the sum, on condition of repaying it by instalments out of my salary. The only thing is that there are formalities to be gone through, and the head of the firm is away.”

“I will run over to Kensington to-morrow. At any rate, you could borrow it of your sister on her return till matters are settled. We must avoid the disgrace of an execution, my dear friend, we must, indeed.

Think of the neighbours, the talk, the disparaging remarks that would be made."

"Oh! what is disgrace?" Bryan said, almost with a moan of pain. "I have lost my own self-esteem, and that is the worst misfortune of all."

And saying this, he looked so nearly on the point of bursting into tears, that the curate, who loved Bryan like a brother, and who was afraid of being unmanned also, instead of the affectionate words of consolation that he would fain have offered, continued in a brusque, business-like way,

"Come, where do the people live? What shall I say? How many days am I to ask for? Let us settle everything, and I will call in at your office after my visit tomorrow and report."

"No, do not do that. I would prefer to wait till after business hours, when I will

call on you here instead. You see, I try to keep my mind as free from worry as possible when at my desk, otherwise I might be making a muddle of affairs there. Oh ! if you can get me a little respite, you will be the truest friend I have ever had in my life."

"I will do my utmost with God's help," answered the curate fervently, adding in a timid, hesitating tone, "And do you, my dear friend, follow my example and seek comfort and counsel from the never-failing Source."

Bryan said nothing, but pressed the friendly hand held out to him, and Mr. Starffe, who was one of the delicatest-minded men alive, felt further emboldened to say,

"And Mrs. Fleming ? Does she bear this calamity well ?"

"She does not know the worst yet. I

have put off telling her about the threat held over me in the hope of averting it," Bryan said, colouring. "But, of course, unless help is forthcoming, I must disclose all. I wish we could send the children away for a time, at least, the elder ones. If—this happened and they—knew of it, I could never hold up my head before them again."

"Let Patrick come here for a few days, anyhow. It will be one care the less for both Mrs. Fleming and yourself just now, and I promise you he shall get off to the city in good time, and be well looked after. Send him to-morrow."

"I will do so gladly, and thank you with all my heart. Ours is a sad home for the poor children just now," Bryan said. Then the two friends separated, Bryan to seek his sleepless and nightmare-haunted pillow, Mr. Starffe to sit up into

the small hours trying to devise some efficacious help for his friend. He had domestic claims, although a bachelor, as we have said, and after discharging these and paying up a small assurance for sickness and old age, there was nothing left to lay by out of his narrow income. Still he had always a little money in the house, and fifty pounds deposited in a bank, and he decided to place both sums at Bryan's disposal till he should see better days. He decided also, in spite of all that Bryan could say, to have recourse to Helwyse as soon as she returned. Should he act on Bryan's behalf without any reference to her, he felt sure that she would blame his conduct, and he thrilled with pleasure at the thought of seeing her sweet face once more. She was expected daily and hourly. She would surely be back to-morrow !

But after allowing his thoughts to dwell on Helwyse for a little while, the curate reproached himself for such misplaced egotism. Surely now was not the moment to think of his own gratification, and, after all, how much more room there seemed for disappointment rather than hope? Helwyse might yet linger on her homeward journey, Bryan's creditors might prove implacable. The worst must be prepared for.

Mr. Starffe, ever the humblest of the humble, prayed longed and earnestly before retiring that night, and in his pious prayers it was less worldly than spiritual good that he asked, resignation rather than immunity from suffering, strength to bear rather than no sufferings to be borne.

Should it not always be so? When we pray otherwise, do we not forfeit the high

prerogative and privilege of true prayer, which, if worthy of the name, brings us nearer to the All-renouncing, Self-forgetting, Ineffably-loving, whose name, no matter in what tongue pronounced, is God.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TEAR-STAINED MISSAL.

ONLY Bridget noticed the anxious looks that now made supper-time the worst part of the day ; Uncle Bryan's clouded brow and Aunt Emmie's pale, often tear-stained cheeks, surely meant some unexpected trouble, some new foreboding of evil, as yet unknown to her ! What could it be ? How could she help them ? Hilary had been so much better of late that she was no longer in immediate apprehension about him, and her generous young heart yearned to her protectors in the hour of their need. Bryan had ever

been tenderly kind to the orphans, Emilia, if with a bad grace, had done her duty to them ; it was only natural that Bridget should contemplate any requital in her power, no matter at what cost to herself.

“ It must be some distress about money matters,” she thought ; “ our illness last spring cost so much money, and there is Patrick’s apprenticeship to pay for—fifty pounds, Aunt Emmie said, and the doctor’s bill was so large ! Yes, I *must* do something. If needs be, I will go to Mr. Papillon ; I will speak to Aunt Emmie about it.”

But Aunt Emmie was not a person like Helwyse on whose neck she could fall with tears and kisses in season or out of season, and partly from shyness, partly from want of opportunity, Bridget put off speaking till it was too late, and Aunt Emmie herself took the initiative. She, in her turn, had

thought of Papillon's proposal to provide for Bridget, which, of course, had been made no secret; and accusing the girl of hardness, or at least indifference, Emilia began one morning brusquely,

"How can you sit with your hands before you, Bridget, when you must see plainly enough that your Uncle Bryan and myself are worried to death about money matters? I have said a dozen times that I will never turn you out of doors as long as we have a roof over our heads and bread to eat, but I do not know how long that will be now, so the sooner you bestir yourself to do something, the better it will be for us all."

"I was going to speak to you about it, dear Aunt Emmie," Bridget said, feeling the speech as if it were a blow.

"Words won't pay debts," Emilia answered, unconsciously repeating Shakespeare. "We have got bills to pay and

don't know how to pay them. The time is come to leave off talking and begin to act."

"I suppose I had better go to Mr. Papillon," Brigitte answered, still crimsoning under the implied reproach.

"If your Aunt Helwyse were here, it would be very different," Emilia continued in the same sharp, uncompromising tone. "You could go to her for a time whilst you looked out for a situation ; but you are old enough to be treated like a reasonable being, Bridget, and to understand that I mean it as no unfriendliness when I say you must really set about earning your own living at once."

"Is Uncle Bryan ruined?" asked Bridget, frightened by something in Emilia's manner, a restlessness, a dread, a look of dismay she had never seen before.

"We have been spending more than we could afford. That is all. This year has been such an expensive one ; what with doctor's

bills, Patrick's apprenticeship, and everything put together, your Uncle Bryan does not know where to turn for money. You see," poor Emilia went on, feeling as if she were bound to speak out now for once and for all, and so explain apparent unkindnesses past and to come. "We had only just enough to live upon before you came, and Uncle Bryan's income has had to do for almost twice the number since. We have both done our best, I am sure."

Bridget felt very sorry for Aunt Emmie, then, but sat still without a word to say. Large tears rolled down her cheeks as the full meaning of Emilia's words came home to her. Uncle Bryan was in difficulties, and she and her brothers were the cause of it all.

"I am very sorry," she began at last.

"Oh! what use does it do to be sorry? It was not your fault. We

must make up our minds to live differently in future. We shall have to sell off our furniture, your uncle says, and go into lodgings, and so you can easily understand how thankful I should be to have you away. And perhaps Aunt Helwyse will take Hilary for a time. But do not say a word to Patrick and the children—they cannot help us."

The appeal of trust conveyed in the last sentence somewhat healed the wounds inflicted by Emilia's former speeches. Bridget felt that the time had come when she could perhaps repay her uncle and aunt for all their past sacrifices.

"I wish Aunt Helwyse were here to advise me," she said. "But there is nothing else to do, auntie; I will go to Mr. Papillon to-morrow. He is sure to be able to do something for me."

"I am sure it is the best plan we

can think of," Emilia answered, in a softer tone, "Aunt Helwyse may not return for weeks. If I were in her place I would stay away as long as I could, I am sure. But she told me that Mr. Papillon seriously wished to adopt you as his own child, and though he may have changed his mind, he is sure to help you and put you in the way of earning your living, and after a while you might have Hilary to live with you."

The mention of Hilary brought home to Bridget's mind all the effect and all the pain implied in the words she had just uttered—I will go to Mr. Papillon to-morrow. She sat for a moment trying to master herself, then said in an unsteady voice,

"May Hilary go to tea with Miss Wren to-morrow night, and sleep at her house? She has often asked him to stay a day or two, and I think he would not fret so much

at my going if he were away at the time."

"Oh, certainly, I shall be very glad. I am too worried to look after him just now, and I think of sending the little girls to their aunt at Brixton till—" she stopped suddenly, crimsoned, and answered—"till we are settled again. I hardly know what I do or say just now. But don't let us sit talking any more. Put on your hat and go to Miss Wren, then when you come home, you had better write to Mr. Papillon, and ask him what he can do for you."

Then Emilia went away, leaving Bridget in a state of miserable suspense and bewilderment. What could have happened? What did it all mean? she asked herself again and again. Aunt Emmie spoke of selling off furniture and going into lodgings, Uncle Bryan must be ruined then?—and she and her brother had brought it about! Still, could they help it? They

had no one else to turn to for bread and shelter, they could not beg or steal, they could not starve. What other refuge had been open to them?

After a while she put on her hat and cloak, and set out on her errand like one in a dream. She did not go straight to Miss Wren. Her heart was too full to make that first preparation for departure; but passionately craving a little solitude and a little time for thought, she drew her veil over her tear-wet cheeks and set out on a long walk.

We are most alone in a crowd, and Bridget, fearing to encounter neighbours in the rustic lanes near home, chose the busy thoroughfares leading to Islington. It was an unfriendly day, with a leaden sky, and clinging mists, precursors of wintry fogs to come. The ordinarily animated Seven Sisters' Road looked dull

and lifeless to-day, the damp, grey atmosphere sucked out all the colour from the shop windows, and the omnibuses crawled along the miry road dismally. In fact, you could hardly find a scene more illustrative of the adage, “Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.”

Bridget walked along quickly, knowing that she could not walk away from her trouble, only hoping to reconcile herself to it, to grow resigned to the inevitable by looking it steadfastly in the face. The way was dreary as could be, and the mist changed gradually into a persistent drizzle ; still poor Bridget went on. There is a little Roman Catholic chapel in these parts, unattractive without and within, yet to the girl’s aching heart the sight of its open doors was welcome as smiling harbour to tempest-tossed mariners. With a

sigh of inexpressible relief she put down her umbrella, and entered. There were lights burning on the altar, and one or two worshippers kneeling here and there. How still it was, how solemn, how tranquillizing to the care-laden soul ! Having crossed herself and meekly prayed on her knees—for Bridget's Protestantism had a strong Catholic leaven in it, and had Aunt Emmie permitted, she would have gone to mass always—she sat down in a retired corner, and bringing out her little *paroissienne* or missal, read and meditated by turns.

It was the second of November, that day dedicated by the Catholic Church to the dead, when especial prayers are offered up for the beloved ones gone into silence, and their tombs are covered with the choicest garlands of the year. Bridget thought of the neglected graves belonging to her in far off Dauphiné, and as one by one, her

childish years now passed before her mind, intensified, brightened, solemnified by remoteness and absence, and the present sacrifice she was about to make appeared clear, unescapable, and familiar, the fountain of her tears was loosed, and burying her face in her hands, she sobbed bitterly.

She was about to relinquish that precious charge, to break that solemn vow, to snap that lovely bond, which hitherto had been not only all in all to her, but her very life itself, the beginning and middle and end of her aspirations, hopes, and desires. How could she leave Hilary? How could he live without her?

And then the little prayer-book to which she turned for comfort, but added fresh keenness to her sorrow, and awakened piquant self-reproach. It had been given by her dying mother, and she ever regarded it as a pledge of the promise

which had made death easy. "I can die now because I know you will take care of little Hilary," were the last words of that early-lost, almost dream-like mother. And in her excessive grief, Bridget accused herself of breaking her word, failing in her duty to the dead now. The poor child felt as if she must have some response from the tomb, some message from the Unseen, to comfort her before she went away, and again and again she cried in the bitterness of her despair—

"Oh! mother, mother, forgive me. It is my duty that drives me away from Hilary. Mother, do you hear me? I am forced to leave him. I am forced into breaking my promise, mother dear."

In the depths of her keen self-reproach and almost despairing penitence, it was less herself, her own heartbrokenness and desolation, that she commiserated then, than

the mute, helpless, desecrated love of that dead mother. Bridget possessed in abundance the passionate protectiveness and self-abnegation which so largely enter into maternal love, and as she thought of the solemn pledge she was about to break, and the sweet charge she was about to relinquish, a great bitterness filled her heart. But there were stronger things even than a promise given to the dead, a love ready to sacrifice life itself for the beloved one. She did not reproach anyone. She felt it childish even to reproach herself. Crushed, bruised, broken in spirit by the weight of sorrow suddenly laid upon her, she bowed down her head, murmuring,

“ Oh ! mother, do hear me, do be sorry for me. Can you not hear me where you are, mother ? ”

Had a confessor come that way, she would most likely have poured out her

troubles to him, and gone home with a lightened heart. She quitted the chapel as she had entered it, uncomforted, care-laden, perplexed, feeling her young life a burden heavier than she could well bear.

But it must be borne, and the coming trial must be faced bravely as it might. Aunt Helwyse still remained in Italy, Uncle Bryan was in trouble, Aunt Emmie had given her to understand that they could offer her bread and shelter no longer. She must go to Mr. Papillon.

As she slowly walked homeward, however, one thought gradually brightened the dismal prospect. The old ambition, the old craving, the old love for the drama came back, and she made up her mind that she should go on the stage, and, for the sake of those so dear to her, perhaps like Aunt

Helwyse, win fame and fortune. Of late she had not thought much of the matter, and indeed Papillon's proposal to train her as an actress had been almost forgotten ; but now alike the promise and the future to which it pointed were very welcome. "Oh ! to be rich and to have Hilary with me always," she thought as she drew near home. Her wildest dream was bounded within these limits. She only wanted Hilary. Her kind old friend, Miss Wren, gave her some melancholy comfort.

"Don't you fret, my dear," she said, patting her encouragingly on the shoulder, "Hilary will be as happy as possible after a day or two. Children have no hearts, bless them ! If they had memories as we have, they would be turned into miserable old folks at once. I shall keep my eyes on the boy, too, and if he pines I will let you know."

"Thank you," poor Bridget said. "And I suppose I shall be able to come and see him before very long?"

"Of course, of course. You are not going to Australia, and Hilary is no longer a baby. He will soon have to go to school like the rest."

All this was quite true, and Bridget tried to take refuge in the reflection that perhaps she was deceiving herself, and Hilary would not feel her going very keenly after all. She did not say a word about the coming departure at tea-time, but when the little girls had been put to bed, and it was Hilary's turn to be undressed, she took him in her arms, and said, with well-affected cheerfulness—

"Oh, Hilary, I have such news for you! You are going to-morrow to stay two whole nights at Miss Wren's."

"Will you be there, Bridget?" asked

the little lad, looking almost ready to clap his hands, but not quite.

“What a question! Of course not! You are a big boy now, and have four pockets in your coat; and it is high time you should begin to pay visits on your own account, like a man.”

Hilary did not look entirely convinced.

“But I am going on a visit too,” Bridget added, in the same tone of well-feigned light-heartedness; “and mine will be longer.”

“Don’t stay more than ten days, Bridget,” Hilary said, thinking he thus gave a liberal margin.

“Nonsense! When I tell you what I am going for, you will jump for joy. I am going to earn money like Aunt Helwyse, and when I have got enough, we shall all live together—Patrick and Ambrose and you and I, in a little house of our own. Won’t that be nice?”

“ I should not like to leave Uncle Bryan and Aunt Emmie. No, Bridget, don’t go away. What do we want money for ? ”

“ If we don’t want money, we ought to work for our living. Idleness is a sin and a shame, Hilary, and I cannot be idle any longer.”

“ But how long will you be away this time ? ” Hilary asked, regarding these castles in the air as far too remote to be connected with the next day’s visit.

“ I do not know ; but you must not fret ; and I shall leave you my little purse, and three threepenny pieces in it, to spend whilst at Miss Wren’s.”

That was too delightful a prospect, and Hilary fairly clapped his hands, and sang in the gladness of his heart.

“ Oh, you kind Bridget ! I shall buy a ball of string, and a top; and a cake for Miss Wren, and still have some left. Only

you must tell me when you will be back, you know, because I shall save a penny to spend on you."

Then he put his arms round her neck and kissed her a dozen times, calling her his sweet Bridget, his dear little Bridget, his lovely Bridget, and begging her, by the love she bore him, not to go.

Poor Bridget's heart was full, but she was determined not to give way. She wanted to leave him some parting injunctions that should stay in his mind, and make cheerfulness appear as a duty to her more than anything else. The little fellow was capable of self-control, and could often throw off ailments or fits of wilfulness for her sake. What she wished him to feel was this : that, whether near or far off, her love would still be with him, and that he of all others could best help her to bear the coming separation.

"Listen to me, Hilary," she said, still holding him on her knees, feeling the sadness and solemnity of the occasion much as some poor mother speaking last words to the little ones she is about to leave for ever, keeping back the tears that would undo the lesson, hiding by a smile the bitter pain none can share—"you must not fret when I am gone, but be happier than ever, saying to yourself when you laugh in your play: how pleased poor Bridget would be to see me just now! And when you are inclined to cry and be miserable, you must think—No, I won't, because poor Bridget is away."

"But you couldn't see if I cried, you know; so *you* wouldn't be miserable about it," Hilary said, after a little pondering. He did not mean to let Bridget dream of such a thing, but he felt sure that when the time came he should cry!

"I should find out somehow," she answered with a wise look, still taking refuge in a voice and manner unlike her own; "I would rather stay, of course, I do not want to go a bit, but when a thing must be, it must be. I should be a goose, and you too, if we were to cry our eyes out."

"You are joking, Bridget. You could not laugh if you were really going away," Hilary said, half inclined to cry all the same.

"No, I am going and you are going, and there are the three threepenny pieces," she cried, opening her shabby little purse in order to display her treasures. "My threepenny pieces to-day, Hilary's the day after to-morrow."

"I would rather have you stay and keep only one of the threepenny pieces," Hilary said, as he lay still wide awake in his

little bed. “I am afraid the bad fairies will get hold of you. Don’t you know what the poem you taught me, says, Bridget ?

‘They took little Bridget,
And kept her seven years long,
When she came home,
Her friends were all gone.
They took her lightly back
Betwixt the night and morrow,
They thought she was asleep,
But she was dead of sorrow !’

No, my darling, I am afraid to let you go,” the child said, stretching out his arms and clasping her tight. “ You will be kept seven years long, and when you come back, your friends will all be gone. I loved that song of William Allingham’s best of all till now ; but if you go, I shall never sing it any more.”

“ Nonsense. There are good as well as bad fairies, if any at all,” Bridget said.

"What have I done to offend either?
What does the first verse say, too?

'Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping altogether,
Red cap, blue jacket
And white owl's feather.' "

"But some of them *did* take little Bridget, you know," Hilary said. "If it is in the poem it must be so. No, if you want to earn money, dress up like a poor old woman and sing in the streets, and I will hold the cap under the windows. Then we can go as far as Barnet and sit down and eat bread and cheese under the hedges when the sun is hot. That would be a very nice way of getting pennies indeed."

She let the little fellow prattle on till at last he drowsed in her arms, then, lifting the curly head from her bosom, laid it down on the pillow with such passionate

tears and kisses as only mother-like hearts can know. For are there not two kinds of motherhood—the one called by another less sacred name, yet as deep, as tender, as self-sacrificing ?

How could she leave him, she thought again and again, as she wept and prayed beside the sleeping boy ?—hoping, praying that on the morrow some providential hand would yet be interposed on her behalf and enable her to keep the clouds from darkening Hilary's little life yet awhile.

There was still just a gleam of hope that after all the sacrifice might not have to be made. Aunt Helwyse was expected home every day, and would, perhaps, return to-morrow, or Uncle Bryan's affairs might take a sudden turn for the better. A dozen things might indeed happen to ward the blow from Hilary's tender heart. Of her own suffering she did not think now.

When she went down to supper, things did not look promising. Bryan returned late from the city, and sank into an arm-chair with a weary sigh, and without the usual greeting.

When Emilia said cheerfully—

“ Bridget has at last made up her mind to accept good fortune, and is going to her kind friends for good to-morrow,” he merely answered in a listless voice—

“ To that rich lady, Mrs. Cornwell ?”

“ No, to Helwyse’s other friend, the one who offered to adopt her altogether—don’t you remember ?”

“ Did Helwyse wish it ?” asked Bryan.

“ At the time Helwyse wished it above all things,” Emilia answered with a touch of pique, “ and she cannot blame us for acting without her advice now. She is not here to help the poor children herself.”

“ And do you wish it, my dear ?” Bryan said kindly, turning to Bridget.

"Bridget wishes to do what is best for us all," Emilia replied, before Bridget had time to put in a word. "At any rate, she can try it for a time, and by-and-by something better may be thought of."

"Yes. Go to your friends, if they will take you in, for the present," Bryan said, looking at the girl's pale face very pityingly.

Just then Patrick came in, and the four moved to the supper-table. Patrick, the lightest-hearted, most thoughtless lad alive, was far too much inflated with his new dignity as articled clerk in a land surveyor's office, to take the troubled looks of his elders much to heart, and for his sake they had tried to eat and drink as usual.

When Bridget came down next morning, things looked just as gloomy. No proposal was made to alter yesterday's arrange-

ments. No letter had come from Helwyse. Bryan had said to Emilia before leaving, "By all means let poor Bridget go to her friends for a time," and that was all, leaving her to make the necessary preparations.

"By the way, did you write to Mr. Papillon yesterday, Bridget," asked Emilia, after breakfast, having in her own mind a very indistinct idea of what Bridget's friend was like, imagining him, indeed, to be some elderly, eccentric person, who might adopt her as his daughter and bequeath her his fortune.

"I forgot all about it, auntie; but it does not matter," the girl said, with almost a touch of fretfulness. Now that she must leave Hilary, nothing else seemed to matter to her. "Mr. Papillon said to me, you can come to me at any time when you want a friend. I am only taking him at his word."

"We cannot always take people at their word. But, if possible, I will go with you to Mr. Papillon. Oh ! if Aunt Helwyse could only come back !" Emilia said, in a dismal voice.

"Should I go to stay with Aunt Helwyse instead ?" asked Bridget, ready to catch at straws.

"I was not thinking of you just then, but of other things," Emilia answered, and Bridget noticed that early as it was in the day, her aunt had already been shedding tears.

What could it all mean ?

CHAPTER XII.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

HUBERT PAPILLON was one of those men who like to appear to the best possible advantage before their fellows ; in other words, he never neglected his toilette. He had the natural reluctance of a well-bred man of the world to affect those eccentricities of genius, which, like mendacious sign-boards, are often displayed to mislead the vulgar or incautious. Whilst courting, therefore, the society of authors and artists, and delighting in the brotherhood this intimacy implied, he would not for the world have neglected the cut and dry observances of

fashionable life, although they wearied him at times. Thus, he was perpetually dining out in great houses, whilst in his secret heart he would have preferred to stay away, and perpetually lamenting the social obligations which took up so much of his time, and which he could have relinquished in a day had he pleased.

He often wondered to himself why he went on, year after year, doing the things that he hated, that benefited nobody, and that wasted the larger portion of his life. Perhaps, after all, he might find it difficult to fill the void now occupied by society—so-called—that is to say, fashionable dinners, balls, promenades, and so on. Yet there must surely be some nobler, or at least more satisfying occupation for leisure hours than those hollow hospitalities, those monotonous pleasures, those empty entertainments ! And, ah ! by-and-

by, it might be too late to change the tenour of his existence, he thought. He was verging on that period of existence when youth ends, and, to most men, who are not already beginning to live over again in their children, complacent, self-indulgent, ease-loving, middleage begins. Papillon naturally liked to think himself young still, to contemplate a fair but far-off prospect of what, in common language, is called "settling for life." He was always meaning, at the eleventh hour, to forsake that careless-hearted, free-and-easy bachelor existence, and plunge boldly, for once and for all, into love and marriage. But neither the one nor the other had yet come in his way, and he determined not to go out of his way to seek them. Falling in love, he reasoned, like poetry, must be spontaneous, or not at all, and in one respect are we not always young, whatever

the looking-glass may say to the contrary ? We are never too old for romance. Thus he consoled himself, whenever he was reminded that he was young in years no longer. On this particular occasion, he made his toilette with more than usual care. He was not bidden to an extraordinarily brilliant entertainment, but he felt that any day the romance he loved to dream of might begin. The “bright and particular” star might rise above his horizon, the voice none others heard he might hear, the hand others could not see might beckon him away. And partly, perhaps, on account of the depressing weather, partly because he had not taken his customary Alpine excursion this autumn, he owned, as he looked in the glass, that the years were beginning to tell. A warmer heart and a more generous nature were not to be found in the world than his, but he was just a trifle vain, and such a reflection mortified him.

When the finishing touch had been put to his toilette, however, and he surveyed himself for the last time with well-merited self-approbation, he rang the bell for a cab, and descended leisurely. In the ordinary course of events, his faithful French servant, Desiré, no sooner heard that bell than, in the twinkling of an eye, a cab was hailed from the neighbouring stand, a great-coat was fetched ready brushed for his master to put on, and there was nothing to do but drive off. But it was easy to see to-night that something unusual had happened. The front door stood wide open, neither Hansom nor great-coat had been thought of, and there on the threshold stood Desiré, Cerberus-like, in polite altercation with a young lady outside.

“I tell you, miss,” he said, “that my master is going out to dinner this very minute, and cannot see anyone to-night. He ought to be off now.”

"But indeed I must see him. I have come a very long way, and I thought I should never find this place," poor Bridget said—for it was she—ready to cry. Then, catching sight of Papillon, she darted forward in spite of the vainly remonstrating Desiré, and cried joyfully—

"Oh! Mr. Papillon, the servant wanted to send me away, but I would not go. You said I might come to you if ever I needed a friend, and I need one now, so I have come."

Papillon was so much taken aback by the whole incident that he stood gazing at his interlocutor, speechless. He did not at first in the least remember who it was now speaking to him. The long curly black hair he thought he remembered, and also the large dark eager eyes, but nothing else. He only knew that the young creature clutching hold of his arm so eagerly, was

beautiful ; thus much could be seen by some eyes under the most trying circumstances.

"It is I, Bridget Fleming. Have you forgotten all about me ?" Bridget said, still holding him fast. "We were at Beechholme Park together, and we used to go to tea to Mr. Freeland's, and you offered to train me for the stage."

A glimmer of light was gradually penetrating Papillon's mind.

"Yes, indeed, I remember you," he answered, kindly, though a good deal embarrassed, all the more so as he glanced down at Bridget's bag, waterproof cloak, and umbrella. "And you have come a long way, you say ? and I am obliged to go out to dinner. How unfortunate !"

"But you will not be going out to dinner to-morrow as well, will you ?" Bridget asked, quite naturally.

"No, indeed. Can you come to-mor-

row?" he continued, still far from realising the situation. "Or did you intend to stay? I don't understand it, my dear!"

"I have come to stay altogether, if you please," Bridget said, reassured by his friendly manner, and explaining things as simply as if she were a six year old child. "I intended to write, but there was so much that I could not say in a letter, and I thought I had better leave everything to explain when I got here. You said I might come at any time, you know," she added, looking straight into his face.

"Of course, of course. It is a pleasant little surprise, that is all," Papillon said, still red and uneasy. Then feeling conscious of Desiré's penetrating gaze being fixed on them both, and that for the sake of appearance he must put on a paternal air, he stooped down, or rather—for Bridget was as tall as himself—he bent

forward, and kissing her on each cheek in French fashion, added, in a tone of well affected cordiality,

“And most welcome you are, my dear little girl; but come with me to be introduced to my housekeeper, for I must be off at once.”

“The clock is on the stroke of half-past seven, sir, and the cab is waiting,” said Desiré.

“And that unfortunate dinner is sure to be punctual! But come, my dear,” Papillon cried, taking Bridget by the hand, and leading her into a little side parlour where sat an old lady, with silver hair, and dressed in scrupulous black silk. “This is Mrs. Plumsted, and she will take the greatest care of you, I am sure. Mrs. Plumsted, Miss Bridget Fleming, my—adopted—daughter—I mean,” he said smiling, as he hastily glanced at Bridget’s tall stature and

beautiful face, “the young lady who was to have been my adopted daughter years ago, when she was quite a little girl. You remember that I spoke to you of her, don’t you ?”

“ Oh, lack-a-daisy, sir, how you do surprise one, to be sure !” said the old lady, who had been Papillon’s nurse from his earliest babyhood, and humoured her somewhat wayward master in everything. “ How you do make one’s hair stand on end, to be sure, Mr. Hubert, and no sheets aired for the spare room, nor nothing ! But sit down by the fire, missy dear, and you would like some tea now, wouldn’t you ?” she continued, taking Bridget by the hand.

“ That is right. Give her some tea and make her quite comfortable. But really, now, I must be off. Good night, my dear,” Papillon said to Bridget, then nodding to both he left them.

Bridget felt more at home than might have been expected under the circumstances. The fire burned so brightly in the grate, the little parlour was so snug and cosy, the pet kitten playing on the hearth, so sociable, and her old hostess so cordial and communicative, that she soon forgot the many times she had lost herself on the way from King's Cross to Bryanstone Square, and the coolness of Desiré's reception.

"Deary me, and you are come to stay altogether, are you? How odd Mr. Hubert is! What other young gentleman—for he is always young to me—would ever have thought of such a thing, and you as big as himself, to be sure! But, bless your heart, missy, Mr. Hubert is very old for his years, and the kindest of the kind, I'm sure. And you have neither father nor mother, my pretty lamb; well, God always sends ways and means, I say,

leastways to those who read their Bibles and go to church on Sunday. Mr. Hubert doesn't go to church much, it is true ; but then he is so clever, and I am sure those clever men who write plays and that, have no time to work out their salvation like the rest. Have they now, missy ? But perhaps you don't know the nature of them as well as I do. Why, Mr. Hubert works like a galley-slave, and often sits up to three o'clock in the morning over his plays !”

“ What time does Mr. Papillon breakfast ?” asked Bridget, thinking of all she had to say to her protector on the morrow.

“ Oh, miss, what a question to ask about a clever gentleman like Mr. Hubert ! As if he had any particular time ! Sometimes at nine, sometimes at ten, sometimes at eleven, and sometimes at an hour I wouldn't like to mention. You had much

better breakfast with me here at eight o'clock, miss, and make sure of it."

"If I may, I would rather wait for Mr. Papillon," Bridget said, "because I want to talk to him, you know, and afterwards he might be busy."

"To be sure. Busy? I just think Mr. Hubert is busy. I never see him except for a moment, I assure you. When my missus was alive, Mr. Hubert's mamma, I mean, it was a very different house, of course. Now there is only the cook, the housemaid, and Desiré, the Frenchman, and me; but in my missus' days, there were seven to table every day in the servants' hall, besides the lady's maid and butler to keep me company. We had everything beautiful, and, I am sure, there was never a better son in the world than Mr. Hubert. But what a change since then! I can't consort with the cook, I always hated

foreigners, so I eat my meals alone."

"That must be very dull for you," Bridget said.

"It is just a trifle. But I sometimes have my great niece with me. She's just your size and age, missy, and plays the piano beautifully; and then she is so handy at threading needles and mending the house-linen."

"Oh! I can sew very well. Let me do some mending for you to-morrow," Bridget asked, eagerly. She had been wondering, as she played with the kitten by the fire, how she could occupy herself whilst waiting for that problematic breakfast of which Mrs. Plumsted spoke.

"Thank you kindly, my dear. I'm sure I've dozens of jobs put aside till Fanny—that is my great niece—comes. But we'll see what Mr. Hubert says. I mustn't be forward and interfere," the old lady said, not feeling sure as yet what position

Bridget was destined to hold in the house.

Then the tea was cleared away, and a little room was got ready for the unexpected visitor—"My niece's room when she's here, and very small ; but it would take a day to get the spare room ready, and I am sure you will prefer to be near me in case of fire or thieves," explained the old lady, conducting Bridget to a pretty little bed-chamber leading out of her own.

Poor Bridget, in spite of all that she had gone through during the day, had no sooner laid her head on the pillow than she was sleeping that delicious sleep of early youth, which nothing short of a thunder-clap can awaken. When an hour later, Mrs. Plumsted came to give a last glance at her charge, alike the care and weariness had passed from her face, leaving only the peace and hope and beauty behind.

Meanwhile, Papillon, driving to his

destination in desperate haste, for he was very late, tried his utmost to assume a cheerful frame of mind. After all, he said to himself, any embarrassment caused by Bridget's arrival, might easily be removed by a dozen expedients. She was not too old to be sent to a fashionable boarding-school, or abroad with a governess, or indeed to be kept in a school-room under his own roof. She was awkwardly tall and grown-up looking, certainly, but very childish in her ways, and could be treated as a child for a year or two longer. Meantime, who could tell what might turn up, or who would come to the rescue? The fact is, Papillon had all but forgotten those pleasant days, Bridget remembered so vividly, and the charm she had then exercised over him. He remembered very indistinctly now the promises he had given, the hopes he had

held out, the words he had used ; and though he would not break his word now, he mildly repented such indiscretion. The girl was a good girl, a clever girl, and what was of far more importance, a handsome girl ; but the whole thing was so unexpected, so out of the common way, so awkward.

"So confoundedly awkward !" he said, and under the circumstances his most fastidious friends would surely have forgiven the expression. "So uncommonly, out and out, confoundedly awkward !"

But the agreeable company, the dinner, the excellent wines, and, most of all, the general interest excited by his narrative, for the story of Bridget's sudden appearance was too good to be kept to himself, revived his spirits. He had seldom talked so much or so well as upon this occasion ; his vanity was, moreover,

flattered by the excitement he had created, and as he drove home he felt that it only needed such an adventure every day to make a dinner party quite delightful. He even thought now of Bridget's presence in the house with a kind of hesitating, uneasy pleasure. Would it not somewhat relieve the monotony of daily existence to have a bright young creature to care for and train up just as he pleased? But how to train up? At forty years of age, a man shrinks from the notion of appearing old and fatherly in the eye of a girl of seventeen, and the more attractive Bridget might prove to him, the more embarrassing he foresaw would be his position. However, such cares are not of a nature to cause sleeplessness, and when Papillon awoke late next morning, he had slept off the uncomfortableness of the evening before. There was no reason why he

should breakfast at one hour more than another, and being rather disposed to indolence, he laid down his head on the pillow, prepared for a final drowse, when an imperative knock at the door roused him past hope.

“If you please, sir, Mrs. Plumsted wants to know if the young lady is to breakfast with her or with you,” said Desiré, tickled at the notion of making his master rise earlier than usual. “It is half-past eight o’clock, and Mrs. Plumsted is just going to sit down to her eggs and bacon, sir.”

“With me, of course,” answered Papillon.
“I will be down in half-an-hour.”

And partly pleased, partly vexed, he did contrive to dress himself in precisely three-quarters of an hour and five minutes.

It was certainly disagreeable to be deprived of the pleasantest sleep of all,

and to have to dress as if one's life depended on it. But it would be sadly wanting in politeness and hospitality to let Bridget eat her first meal in the house without him; and he was lunching out that day, too, and had invited two or three friends to sup with him on the morrow. Bridget must inevitably be consigned to Mrs. Plumsted's little parlour pretty often.

“How uncommon awkward, to be sure!” he ejaculated, as he descended, no longer in dressing-gown and slippers—such bachelor indulgences were not to be thought of—to the dining-room, where the patient Bridget awaited him.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRIDGET'S NEW HOME.

SHE was playing with the kitten on the hearthrug as he entered, and at the sound of his voice rushed up to him eagerly, and held up her face for a kiss. It seemed to her the most natural thing in the world to treat him exactly as she did Uncle Bryan, seeing that he was quite as kind, and certainly must be quite as old! Papillon did not know whether to be pleased or vexed at such an attitude. It made things much easier, but it wounded his vanity, and he was afraid to ask how old she thought him. Still the breakfast

was a very pleasant one. Bridget, making tea opposite to him, could not possibly be prettier, he thought, and that brown stuff dress, plain large linen collar turned back on her shoulders, and red ribbon—how well all these became her! There was a knot of the same red ribbon in her wild black hair, that would flow carelessly, do what she might to confine it, but nothing else in the way of ornament. Her dress was made in the simplest, most childish fashion, yet how little could millinery or fashion books have done for such a face and figure! There she was, a beautiful, eager, fresh young girl, in all her native grace, strength, and innocence, and her future belonged to him; her life, for better or for worse, was in his hands; her beauty was a joy dropped from heaven at his feet. Any man must have felt pride as well as perplexity in the possession of such a heritage.

Papillon soon began to feel that his incautious benevolence would not be without its reward. When they grew more at ease, and talked confidentially, as in the old days at Beechholme Park, all his former delight in her society came back. By the time the meal was half over, he had quite made up his mind not to send her to school ; before he rose from the table, he was quite as decided that Bridget's coming was the pleasantest thing that could have happened to him.

It was so new to the easy-going, hitherto spoiled man of the world to accept the combined responsibilities and homage that Bridget brought him. If he glanced at the newspaper on the sideboard, she sprang to fetch it before he could prevent her. She persisted in waiting upon him as if he were Uncle Bryan, bound to get through his breakfast in ten minutes. During that

first hour of re-acquaintance, she performed a dozen little services which would otherwise have been performed by Desiré, thus making the usually solitary meal amusing and pleasant.

And then, too, it was a novel sensation to Papillon to feel that the business of the day had to be arranged with reference to another person ; that other person a bright young girl, who evidently found the chief consolation of her new position in his society. He noticed with natural interest how she clouded when he said that he should be out all day, and how the clouds vanished when he added—

“ But I shall be home to dinner, and we shall have the whole evening to ourselves.”

“ At what time will you get back ? ” she asked, with childish wistfulness, “ because I shall be looking out to run to the door, you know.”

"Exactly at seven, earlier, if I can. But would you like me to take a walk with you this morning?"

"Oh, above everything! I have so much to say to you, I feel as if I should never, never have done."

"Well, if you will be ready by twelve o'clock, we will walk for an hour in the park."

Long before the time appointed, Bridget was ready, and after running several errands for him, having sewed a button on his glove, and otherwise made herself useful, the two set off. It was a sunny morning, one of the last bright days of the year, and as she walked along by the side of her new protector, she was full of Hilary, and the dear, troubled home at Hornsey Rise. It was only yesterday that she had left it, but already she seemed to have been away a year. Oh! how was it with them all?

Would Hilary be spending his threepenny pieces with Miss Wren in the Seven Sisters' Road? Was Aunt Helwyse home? Had better fortune happened to Uncle Bryan?

"Mr. Papillon," she said suddenly, "when will you be able to see the lady who is to train me for the stage?"

"Well, I could see her to-morrow, if necessary; but why in such a hurry? Can you not make up your mind to be happy with me for a little while?"

"Happy? Yes, but not happy in the right way, and not happy for long either. I must begin to earn money at once, Mr. Papillon. That is what I came to you for."

"There is surely time enough, Bridget. I will buy you everything you want, a little gold watch, and a silk dress, and a fur cloak to keep you warm——"

"Oh!" she said, with scorn, almost anger, in her voice, "how can you think I

care for such things? And if I did care for them, how you must despise me! No, I want to earn money for a very different reason. I have told you before, but you do not seem to listen to what I say. I want to be independent, so as to support Hilary, and have him with me always, and to help the boys, and by-and-by, we shall all live in a little house together, Patrick, Ambrose, Hilary, and I. That would be happiness indeed!"

Papillon made a wry face.

"My dear little Bridget," he said, "I do indeed listen to what you say, and I will do all that I promised. I will speak to that lady about you. I will place you with her as a pupil, if she consents. I will further your wishes by every means in my power. But all this is not to be done in a day. We must find out if you really possess dramatic talent or not."

" You believed so once," poor Bridget said, with tears in her eyes, " and I have improved since then. I know a hundred passages of Shakespeare by heart. I always intended to become an actress, after what you said to me at Beechholme Park."

" You were quite right to persevere, and this very night you shall recite to me, and I will give you my opinion. But, as I say, we had better not be too precipitate."

" But," Bridget cried, still out of heart, and a trifle out of temper, " you would be impatient if you were in my place, I am sure. We all want money so much, and none can earn it but I. Uncle Bryan is very poor, Aunt Emmie said so, and the doctor says that, if Hilary gets a cough this winter, he must go to the sea. Where is the money to come from? I *must* begin at once."

“ You are a good girl, and deserve encouragement,” Papillon answered, now assuming a paternal and authoritative air. “ But, my dear child, you must remember that two years and a half have passed since the time you speak of. I cannot now be sure that this lady will consent to take you. I cannot promise you that I shall also be of the same opinion. I may find you less fitted for the stage than I did then. Will you not trust in me, and believe in me, anyhow? Of one thing I assure you, and that is, that I will be your staunch friend as long as I live.”

“ And if not by acting, how can you help me to earn money?” Bridget asked, struggling against her disappointment.

“ We will see. We will reflect. We will hear what your Aunt Helwyse says,” Papillon answered, cheerfully.

“ I want to do as Aunt Helwyse does,”

Bridget began, in her former eager voice. “If I were in Aunt Helwyse’s place now, I need not be separated from my darling Hilary. I could help the poor boys. I could do a dozen things.”

“Well, Hilary shall come and see you; and if you want money to send him to the sea, I will give it to you. You are—my—adopted—child—now,” Papillon said, hesitating over the unsavoury words—“and must accept what I choose to give you.”

“No,” Bridget said stoutly, “I came to you because you promised to help me towards an independence. I did not come to take your money and be idle. If you won’t let me work for my living, I shall go away. I shall go to the schoolmistress at Stoke Newington.”

“There are more ways than one of earning your living,” Papillon went on, feeling

very Mephistophelean. " You will at least give me time to decide upon what is best. To listen to you, one would think that you doubted my interest—and affection—for you."

" I do not doubt it a bit. I am not ungrateful; I only want you to understand exactly what is in my mind. If we only half understand each other, we might go on quarrelling for ever," she said, with that unsophisticated downrightness he found so charming. " Will you hear me recite to-night, and see that lady to-morrow ?"

" Certainly. What else do you want me to promise ?"

" And if she approves of me, and is willing to receive me as a pupil, will you let me go at once ?"

" No, I cannot promise that. I must think the matter over a little. I must

first quite make up my mind that a dramatic career is the best that could be chosen for you. I am so much older than you, Bridget, I know so much better what life is, and what the world is ; ought I not, in fairness to us both, to give myself ample time to consider a decision so important ? ”

Bridget was silent. Why had he not thought of all this before ? Something of what was going on in that busy brain he gathered from her downcast looks.

“ At any rate, rest assured that I am only thinking of your interests and your happiness when I say this,” he added, very kindly ; “ and meanwhile, you shall not be idling away your time. I will this very day engage a music-mistress for you, and you shall also have lessons in singing. By-the-by, have you ever learned to read and write ? ”

Thereupon both laughed merrily, but

Bridget confessed that there were “hard words in English she could not spell,” and she had not yet got beyond the rule of three in arithmetic.

“Then you have plenty to do for the present,” Papillon said; “and as to the singing, you know, my dear Bridget, an actress must know how to sing.”

“I am afraid it will cost you a good deal,” Bridget replied, looking serious.

“Nonsense! That is my affair—yours is to learn as much as you can, and make up for lost time. The music-mistress and the singing-master shall come to-morrow, and we will do spelling and sums together every morning after breakfast.”

Bridget was delighted at this prospect of improving herself. When Papillon left her, and the long gossipy midday meal with Mrs. Plumsted was over, she sat down and wrote a long letter to Hilary with a

cheerful face. The letter written and posted, she was wondering how she should contrive to get through the four hours that must elapse before Papillon's return, when a welcome message came from Mrs. Plumsted—namely, would Miss Bridget like to help her to tie down the apple jelly? She ran downstairs joyfully, and there were so many pots to be tied down, and so many labels to be written, that the time passed very quickly.

“How handy you are, to be sure, miss!” said the admiring Mrs. Plumsted—“quite domesticated, I see; and as I always say, handiness is worth all the book-learning in the world—leastways, to women—men can afford to be helpless, for God made them otherwise. But bless me, miss, we women-folk must try to save a penny where we can. It’s the curse of the apple, I say, though surely I don’t blame Eve as

much as some people. Think of being shut up in a garden all day long with no one else to speak to but a man, miss, and you as idle as he, and neither one nor t'other able to get away. Why, miss, anything by way of a change would be jumped at by the best of us, were it a sight of the Father of Lies himself."

Bridget replied that she certainly should have liked a little housekeeping and needle-work, had she been in Eve's place. Then, as their task was over, and the clock pointed to a quarter to seven, she ran upstairs to watch for Papillon's return.

He saw the eager face peering out of the cheery, fire-lit room, and when she opened the door for him, and caught hold of his arm joyfully, he felt that homecoming was a pleasant thing. He had thought of Bridget during the day, and had paused before a jeweller's shop con-

tempting a tempting row of little gold watches, asking himself whether he might venture to give her one; but his better judgment decided that he might not. He even refrained from taking home a flower or a book for her, so anxious was he to retain her good opinion. Perhaps it was one of the best results of Bridget's coming that she obliged him to exercise self-denial in little things. To have pleased her by the gift of a trinket would have been a cheaply-bought favour indeed, yet, under the circumstances, he could hardly resist the temptation. He wanted to please her, but he had already found that it was not to be done in the way easiest to himself.

The dinner was as lively as the breakfast had been. Bridget was resolved not to fret about Hilary, but to throw

heart and soul into her readings, her music-lessons, everything that would help to bring them together again. She was young, too, and in extreme youth the most passionately tenacious natures can no more resist outward impressions than young plants the influence of showers and sunshine. The spaciousness, freedom, and old-fashioned elegance of her new home impressed her cheerfully, in spite of the great void and aching wistfulness she felt whenever she thought of Hilary.

Like many richly endowed, generous young natures, Bridget had hitherto suffered from want of breathing room, spiritually and physically. She had been cramped, cooped up, hedged in, body and mind, fitted to a Procrustean-like bed, as many another woman to

a place too small for alike her powers and her will. Here she found herself much less fettered and hampered. She could sit down to the piano, walk out, stay at home, as she pleased ; she could say a dozen things to Papillon she would not have ventured to say to Aunt Emmie. Bridget loved Uncle Bryan tenderly, and felt that she could have gone to him in her troubles, but he had so many troubles of his own !

Patrick was too mere a child at present to enter into her feelings on many subjects, Aunt Helwyse was often away, thus it came about that, when she found herself sitting opposite to her new protector at dinner-time, or handed him his cup of tea, standing, daughter-like, whilst he drank it, there was no more reserve, or consciousness of necessity for reserve, in her mind than if it were really Uncle Bryan instead.

He, on his side, delighted in these sweet girlish confidences, and encouraged her to make a friend of him by divers little arts. It was a melancholy fact that she found him so old, but it consoled him to think that she would herself grow older in time. Such confidingness and candour were delicious in their way, but when a year or two had passed over her head, they would inevitably be replaced by a shyness and reserve more attractive still. Meantime, nothing could be more refreshing to a spoiled man of the world just beginning to feel middle-aged, and "bored" generally, than so novel and unexpected a relationship. Bridget, full of Hilary all the time, and ready to shed tears whenever she spoke of him, loved Papillon with the grateful, unstinting love of a child for its benefactor. The anxiety reigning in her

uncle's house, the numerous daily cares which she could not soften, the sad little quarrels between Aunt Emmie and Uncle Bryan—all these things were fresh in her mind, and Papillon was the guardian angel who had stepped in to help them all by helping her. What would she not do for him! How would she not serve him to show her gratitude!

When the dinner was over, and tea had been sent up into the drawing-room, Bridget serving it, Papillon said hesitatingly—

“ My dear little girl, take up your work and listen to me for a few minutes before you begin your recitations. You will not interrupt me, will you ? ”

“ That depends,” Bridget answered, with demureness. In some respects, the experiences of her early life had made her a little old. She said and did things in a prim,

old womanish way, very pretty and amusing in a girl of seventeen, just developing into a woman and a beauty. “That depends,” she reiterated; then, taking up Hilary’s little stocking, knitted away as fast as she could.

“Now that everything is so nicely settled, you must let me treat you exactly as if you were my own child. Not to do so would be—” he hesitated between the words ungrateful and unbecoming, and finally forsook both for another—“not to do so would be embarrassing to us both. We must begin as we intend to go on, and then we shall not disagree about trifles.”

Bridget opened her large eyes, and looked up half roguishly, half alarmed. What could such an exordium mean?

“You must have an allowance”—and again he hesitated—“like most girls of

your age, to buy your clothes with, you understand."

"I want no new clothes. My box is coming to-morrow," Bridget said, looking inclined to be rebellious.

"But clothes wear out; and there are many little things you will need from day to day."

"What kind of things? I have never had any money in my life. I never want any—to spend, I mean. When I begin to earn money, it will be for my poor boys and our little house."

"Well, in the meantime it will be much better for you to have a little purse of your own than to be going to your uncle or your Aunt Helwyse. Indeed, that I could not permit, any more than I can permit you to be without money."

And, saying this, he put on an absurdly grave and patriarchal air.

"Ah ! I understand," Bridget said, dropping her work, and looking on a sudden full of mortification and concern, "you are ashamed of my shabby appearance ? You want me to wear a dress with flounces, and a bonnet with a feather in it ?"

"No, indeed, I much prefer you as you are ; and to show you that I am in earnest, I will tell you what you shall do with your first quarter's allowance, if you like. You shall send Hilary to the sea."

Bridget's face became suddenly radiant, then as suddenly overcast.

"It would be delightful if I had done anything for the money. The cold weather is so trying to him ; and I know it would be the best thing possible. But what right have I to the money? No, Mr. Papillon, do not say another word about it, please."

“Listen to me a minute. Bridget, you came here, did you not, to make my home your home, to accept my protection, counsel, help, to regard me in every way as your true friend and best adviser. How are we to live together, how am I to do my duty to you, if you throw obstacles in the way of every intention, and oppose my most trifling wish? There is nothing I will not try to do in order to please you. Will you refuse to do so small a thing for my pleasure?”

And, saying this, still looking aggrieved, paternal, everything but like himself, Papillon took a cheque for twenty pounds from his pocket-book, and placed it on the table.

“Shall we vex each other about such a trifle? I don’t want you to accept the cheque because it would be getting my own way. I only want you to understand that for the present, whilst you are a mere

child, you must look to me for everything. And I also want you to be easy in your mind about the little boy. How can you throw heart and soul into your work—whatever it be—if the cold weather makes Hilary ill?"

This was too much for Bridget. She forgot everything now except that Papillon was beautifully good and kind, and, taking up the cheque very tenderly—was it not a passport to health for her darling?—kissed his signature, then, crossing over to where he sat, she took up his right hand and pressed it to her lips again and again.

"I hope I do not appear ungrateful. Indeed—indeed I will love you as you deserve," she said, with that childish candour he felt at the same time so delicious and so provoking. Thus peace was made between them. Her scruples being once

overcome, Bridget could talk of nothing else but the cheque. Placing it on the table before her, and resting her head on both arms, she said, with an ever-increasing delight, as she gazed and gazed on her new treasure,

“Twenty pounds! What a large sum of money! When shall I ever earn twenty pounds, I wonder?” she soliloquized, Papillon apparently reading his evening paper, but smiling inwardly as he listened. “But I will not send it all to Aunt Emmie, of course; I will keep back five, and send the rest for Hilary’s trip to the sea. Miss Wren would take him, and they could go to our old lodgings.” On a sudden she said, looking up, “Mr. Papillon, may I change this to-morrow, and write at once to Aunt Emmie?”

“Now the money is yours, you can, of course, do as you like with it,” Papillon

answered. "But why not enclose the whole to save trouble?"

"No," Bridget replied, shaking her head and looking very wise; "I shall keep some of it for myself. If I did not, you would be giving me more, I know."

"Well, do as you please, my dear. And now suppose you begin your recitations?"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

IT was not without many misgivings that Mr. Starffe set out on the errand he had undertaken for his friend. He was little used to business of any kind, had never encountered a creditor, much less a money-lender, in his life, and felt sure of blundering out of very zeal on Bryan's behalf. Still he tried to put on an easy, self-composed air as he approached the dingy little office whither poor Bryan had resorted in his dire need. His mind had long been made up as to what he should say, whilst buttoned up safely in an inner pocket were two or three bank-notes, to be

resorted to if all else failed. What precisely took place on that occasion the curate never related, but he was somewhat fond of dwelling upon the opening incidents in after life. Just as the seafaring man delights to recount his most thrilling shipwreck by the fireside, as the veteran pleases himself by recalling some sanguinary campaign, as the lion-hunter loves to horrify his hearers by the narrative of his doughtiest encounter, so Mr. Starffe feasted on the recollections of his solitary passage of arms with Apollyon, his one interview with Mephistopheles, his first and last contest with Evil Incarnate !

“When I stood on the threshold,” he would say, “I felt like Daniel thrust into the lion’s den ; when I saw what kind of men I had to deal with, I compared myself with David confronting Goliath of Gath ; and when I stepped out into the daylight,

I thanked the Lord as Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, escaped from the fiery furnace."

If Mr. Starffe was thus impressed, his interlocutors, namely, the money-lenders, were certainly no less so. The curate was, in fact, as novel an apparition in those precincts as Gulliver among the Brogdingnagians, and when he brought out a card, stammering, "The Reverend John Starffe, curate of St. Philip's, Hornsey, and a friend of Mr. Fleming's, if you please, gentlemen," the gentlemen in question visibly tittered, and but for a suspicion of what was hidden in their visitor's innermost pocket, would doubtless have at once sent him about his business. But the money once scented (and there are eyes that can detect a bank-note, be it ever so cautiously concealed behind several layers of broadcloth), there

ensued a struggle which might have been ludicrous, were it not painful.

Mr. Starffe was determined not to part with his money except on certain conditions favourable to Bryan, his antagonists were determined to obtain it without any conditions at all, and the curious process by which this was done might have afforded hints to Macchiavelli himself.

It had never occurred to Bryan or Mr. Starffe that there were human beings without softness of heart. They had soft hearts themselves, and they never doubted but that others were similarly endowed. Thus Bryan naturally hoped some good of his friend's intervention. These people might not believe him when he asked ten days' delay in order to see his employers—now absent—and get the necessary advance ; but would they doubt the word of a clergyman and a near neighbour, one, moreover, who had known

him for years? They did not surely take everyone to be a cheat and a liar? But neither Bryan nor the curate saw the matter from the money-lenders' point of view, which was simply and solely speculative and pecuniary. Bryan had made a mess of his affairs, and when he had sought their aid, he had accepted their terms. Whether they were ruinous or not was his affair, not theirs, and he had taken the initiative, not they.

"You see, sir," said one of the two men whom Mr. Starffe found in the office, "you may be a clergyman of undoubted respectability and standing, or you may not. That is not our affair. All we want is our money, and we must get it as best we can. If all the people who ever set eyes on Mr. Fleming since he was born, came with the same story, what difference would it make to us?"

“ Well,” Mr. Starffe said, “ I will tell you again and again, I will pledge myself to pay fifty pounds of the entire sum at the end of ten days. How short a period that is to wait—”

“ We don’t say that it is not ; but it is not the period mentioned in our little agreement. Where would business be if people did not stick to their agreements ? You are a clergyman, sir, surely you ought to agree with us that what a man signs to, that he must abide by. Where is the law, where is justice, where is business of any kind, if a man’s signature stands fornaught ? ”

“ And where is Christian charity, if you so press an honest man, the father of a family, straitened by reason of his benevolence, rather than his faults ? ” asked the curate, in a voice of pathetic remonstrance. But the well-intentioned words damaged his cause, and, more than anything else he

could have said, helped to expedite that little journey already spoken of. How the twenty pounds so safely stowed away in his innermost pockets got transferred into his adversaries' cash-box, he hardly knew ; but, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, and almost with magical mystery and expedition, there they went !

"We can't alter our agreement, but, to oblige you, we will, in consideration of your little present, extend the period to five days. That is a very long time. And, meanwhile, you must remember, sir, that we have no kind of guarantee for our money. We are fathers of families as well as our clients, and have awkward customers to deal with sometimes, I assure you," said the head of the firm, blandly, when the transaction was concluded.

"You need be afraid of no dirty tricks

here," Mr. Starffe said warmly. "Mr. Fleming is a gentleman and a man of honour, and if I had the means, I would undertake the sole responsibility of the debt at once."

"We do not doubt it, sir, but you see such is not the case, and two hundred and thirty pounds is a very large sum. What have we got to show for it? Your two little bank-notes and a piece of paper that may prove not worth a straw. You don't know what losses we are subject to. Only last week one of our clients got away his furniture in the night, and we had a dead loss of eighty pounds."

"Well," said the curate, taking up his hat, "I can only repeat that you will not find you have swindlers to deal with in this case. I am much obliged to you. Good day."

Then he went away, feeling far from elate. With the utmost desire to help his friend, he had done next to nothing, and had also thrown his twenty pounds into the bottom of the sea. A short respite was obtained, certainly, but at what a cost! Bryan's debt was not lessened, the bond was not cancelled, he was still held fast in the gripe of the vampires, and, meantime, there was twenty pounds gone for ever! "What a fool I have been!" he mused, as he walked towards King's Cross station. "Why did I not get a respectable lawyer to go to these people? Why did I think myself a match for their astuteness? Had the money gone as part payment of the debt, I might well have congratulated myself, but as it is, I am so much out of pocket, and Bryan no better off. Oh! the out-and-out fool that I have proved myself!"

He felt so deplorably out of heart, and so utterly weary and woe-begone, that before proceeding any further, he indulged himself in the unprecedented luxury of a glass of sherry and a sandwich at a coffee-house. Then, feeling a little revived, and more hopeful about affairs generally, he despatched a short note to Bryan, telling him of the five days' grace obtained, but of course not mentioning the price.

“After all,” he reflected, as the train brought him nearer and nearer to Kensington, “five days is a long time, Helwyse will surely be back within five days? Bryan can arrange something with his employers; all will yet be made straight.” Then he dwelt on the cheerful side of things, and even when informed that Helwyse had not yet fixed the date of her return, refused to be cast down.

“You see, sir,” said Mrs. Bray, “Miss

Helwyse, like all folks who paint pictures—I've known many, I can assure you, and they are all alike—never takes account of time. She wrote a month ago, and told me to have everything ready, and how I hurry-scurried about to get everything clean and that, you wouldn't believe ; and, bless your heart, I daresay she's safe and sound where she was then. If we hadn't all clocks, so to say, in our insides, for which the Lord be praised, Miss Helwyse, and such like, would never come to meals, that's certain ; but lor' a mercy, the Almighty foresaw how it would be with clever folks when he made them, and so, with a little contrivance, they are kept to regular hours like the rest ! But I do wish Miss Helwyse would write, for I never know when she will ring at the front door, looking as calm and pleasant as if she had only just walked to the post ; and I'm sure, if

it's one chop, it's twenty I've had ready for her, fearing she might come late on a Saturday night."

"Would Mr. Freeland know more of her movements?" asked Mr. Starffe.

"Well, sir, you might ask him, to be sure, and he's just at this moment working with the young gentleman, Master Ambrose, at Mrs. Cornwell's—that's the lady Miss Helwyse is travelling with."

"Yes. I will go and inquire, anyhow," answered the curate, and went away, bowing with such politeness as to make Mrs. Bray declare that, "after all said and done, and the many parsons who had gone over to Rome, and the Pope, and Perdition, and That, there is no set of men so civil-spoken to unprotected females and so harmless in a house as clergymen."

Mr. Starffe found Freeland and Ambrose mounted on high stools, in a new music-

room lately added to Mrs. Cornwell's handsome house. This time Freeland was following out no design furnished by another, but the suggestions of his own fancy, and his fresh and airy decorations promised to make the music-room exactly what it ought to be. The two descended from their perches with a smile of welcome, and Ambrose proudly led their visitor from panel to panel, crying, “Are we not doing lovely things, Mr. Starffe? Is not this bunch of lilies beautiful? Is not this peacock superb?” and so on, anxious for all the praise he could possibly get. He was now a tall, well-grown lad of thirteen and a half, and looked the very impersonification of hope, youth, and self-satisfaction. Not all Freeland’s efforts, nor Helwyse’s influence, could drive that quality out of the boy, but otherwise both had reason to be proud of their pupil.

Freeland looked graver, older, and a trifle careworn, Mr. Starffe thought, and, he could but notice, answered his eager questions about Helwyse in a thin, far-off, unresponsive tone. Do we not detect these differences at once? The voice that greeted our ears a little while ago, joy-laden, triumphant, rich in sound as the Hallelujah Chorus, has been robbed of all its fulness and all its sweetest music, saddening us now like plaintive sea-waves beating on a barren shore. The curate marked the change, and could only suppose that Helwyse had in some way or other vexed her friend, for so she certainly regarded him.

“I do most particularly want to see Miss Helwyse,” he said, having sent Ambrose out of the room on some specious pretext. “I think I may not be violating confidence if I just hint to you that her brother has got into trouble, and it is

quite on my own account that I look to her to help him."

"Of course," Freeland said, still speaking in that remote, unanswered voice. "I am very sorry, but I think you may rely on Miss Helwyse being home in two days. I will show you her last note to me."

And so saying, he took a letter from his pocket-book, how mechanically, how coldly! In former days his fingers would have handled the missive caressingly and proudly, as a mother the curls of her first-born; but now he opened the paper with no more alacrity than if it had been an ordinary document, and read—

"DEAR MR. FREELAND,

"Thank you very much for kindly looking after my pictures for the winter exhibitions; and I am sure the

frames will be just what I should have chosen myself. We have been delayed, but are really to start to-morrow, and expect to be a week on our homeward journey. Mrs. Cornwell was glad to get your message, and Mr. Kingsbury, who joined us at Chamouni, desires me to say how much he is obliged to you for doing his commissions. We are all well, and with kind love to Ambrose, believe me,

“Yours truly,

“HELWYSE FLEMING.

“Lausanne, Oct 5, 186—.”

“Unless their plans are changed at the last moment,” Freeland added, “they will certainly arrive the day after to-morrow ; and the housekeeper here tells me that she shall have everything in readiness on that day. They might be here to-morrow even ; and I know from former notes that Miss Helwyse is very anxious to get back after

so long an absence. It is now six months since she went away."

"Well, I will run down to Kensington again to-morrow evening on the chance. I shall be most thankful to see her. I may, I am sure, just mention that it is about money; and though Mr. Fleming would not, I know, go to his sister himself, I feel quite sure she will not blame me for taking the initiative."

"No, surely," answered Freeland, adding, with a sudden look of his old self, a transient echo of the lost voice, a passing ray of the vanished joy—"I think there is nothing Miss Helwyse would not sacrifice for her brother."

"She is so good, so kind, so generous!" cried the curate, thinking he might give way to his enthusiasm in Freeland's hearing. "And so gifted!" He thought it unbecoming in a clergyman to add "And

so beautiful !” though the words were on his lips. Freeland sat like a statue.

“ And so charming in her ways !” he said instead. “ I never saw a young lady less spoiled by flattery and good-fortune. I am sure she is just as simple and unaffected when she takes tea with us all now as if she were nobody at all, though her pictures are sold whilst yet on her easel, and last May they were praised in the *Saturday Review* !”

Still Freeland made no response. The curate’s naïve speeches no longer elicited even a smile.

“ Of course, I am not going to say that we see as much of her as we used to do,” continued Mr. Starffe, bent on explaining himself, and, as he thought, making matters pleasant all round. “ She has a reputation to keep up, and a large circle of acquaintances incumbent on the position

she has made for herself in society. We must all remember that, but I do affirm, and I am sure no one can contest the point, that Miss Helwyse is as little spoiled by success as a peach is spoiled by hanging in the sun," and he looked so determined to have an answer, that Freeland felt constrained to reply.

"I hope not," he said drily, and, suddenly rising, added—"Suppose we walk through the reception rooms? There are some good modern pictures in the library, and one or two foreign nick-nacks worth looking at." Then he entered with such obstinate animation into the merits of this picture and that, and was so voluminously historic concerning a piece of Marie-Antoinette furniture, that, do all he could, Mr. Starffe was not able to edge in another word about Helwyse.

Soon Ambrose came running after them

with a message to each of the children, and a little parcel, containing a broken knife, three marbles, and a lump of liquorice for Norah.

“And please tell them all how beautifully I paint now,” he said, “and that next Michaelmas I am to be paid ten shillings a week, and directly Aunt Helwyse comes back we are all to go home for the day, Mr. Freeland, auntie, and I!”

“Nay, you must make no promises for me, dear lad,” Freeland said. “I shall have no day to myself for a long time. But do you not think you had better go back to your work, whilst I accompany Mr. Starffe to the gate?”

The boy obeyed, though inwardly puzzled at Freeland’s terrible regard to minutes. What difference could a few minutes here and there make in a long day’s work?

“That is a clever boy, and a good boy,”

Freeland said, whilst taking his visitor round the garden—"a little consequential, and sadly idle at times, but without grave faults."

"What a pleasure it must be to you to have a young companion always; and I suppose, when Miss Helwyse is at home, you see her constantly? That must indeed be a recompense for any trouble your pupil gives you?" cried the curate.

Again Freeland's look and manner changed, and this time so conspicuously that the curate could no longer contain his curiosity. He remembered how cordially Freeland had welcomed Helwyse to his house two or three years ago—how charming and Christian-like had seemed such intercourse between two people in different ranks of society—how delightful had been every incident of that well-remembered visit! Now all was changed, and he burned to know the reason why.

"I hope, my dear sir," he said with friendly concern, "that you and Miss Helwyse are as good friends, as ever? Miss Helwyse always speaks of you in the highest terms, I am sure."

"Oh! we are excellent friends," Freeland answered, a flavour of bitterness in the speech escaping the curate's perceptions.

"I am delighted to hear you say so. I should be extremely sorry to learn that anything had occurred to mar so agreeable an acquaintance. Miss Helwyse is too good and kind to cast off old friends because of increased good fortune."

Freeland listened in silence, and, not till they reached the gate and were on the point of making their adieux, did he give any sign of animation. Then on a sudden his face glowed with the love and eagerness of former days, and he said,

"Must you trouble her about these things directly she returns from her holiday tour? It is hard upon her."

"I fear there is no help for it. It is a long story, and one which I do not feel at liberty to repeat; but as I said, Mr. Fleming is in difficulties, and I am quite sure Miss Helwyse would blame me if I did not go to her for help."

"Surely she would. And I suppose there is nothing I can do?"

"Alas! nothing."

"I have money at command," Freeland added hesitatingly, but the curate shook his head.

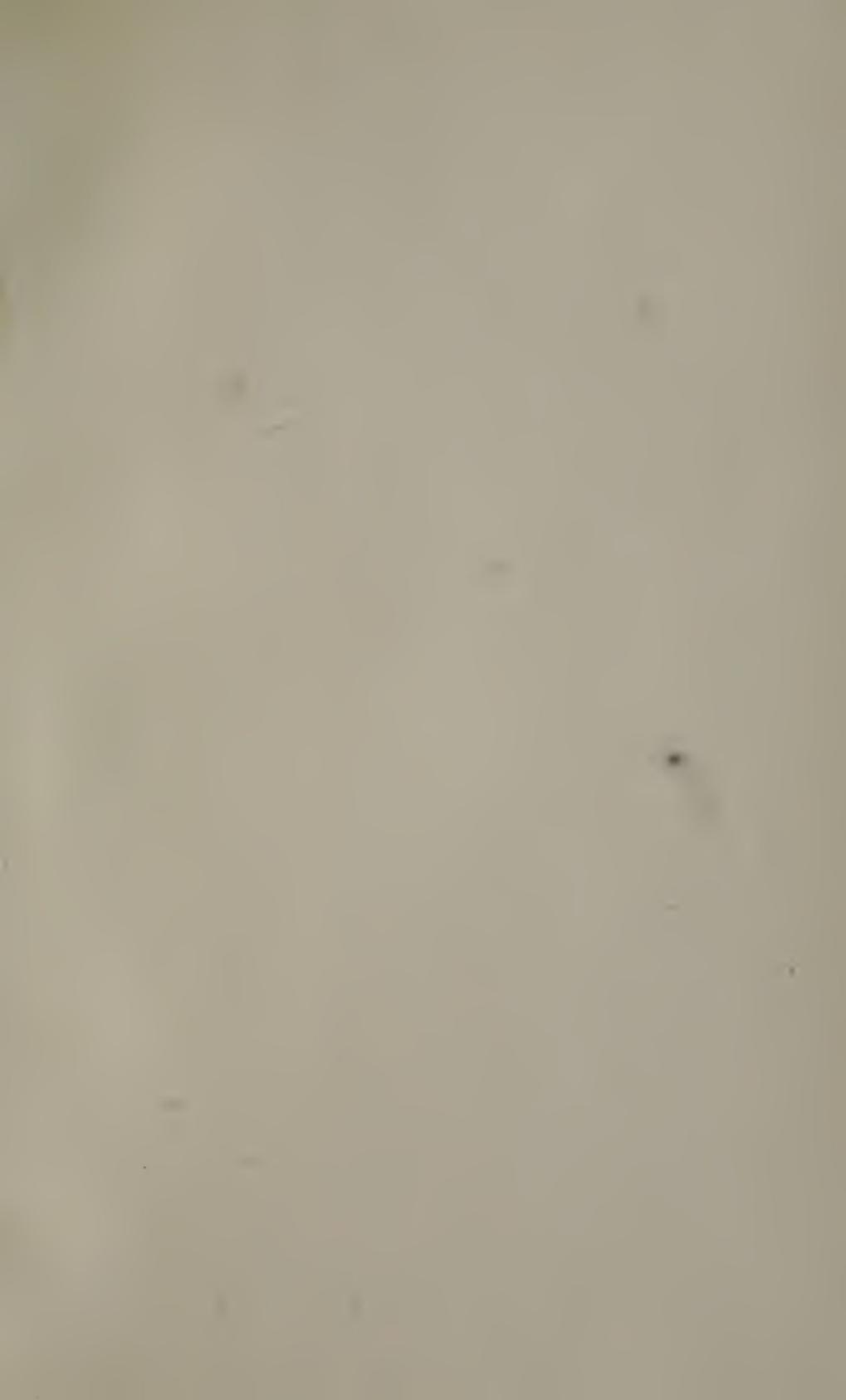
"No," he said. "It would not be fair upon either Mr. Fleming or yourself to accept your offer, but I thank you kindly. There is no one else I feel justified in applying to in this strait except Miss Helwyse, though I feel sure that, like my-

self, you would do anything to save her from trouble."

Then cordially shaking each other by the hand, the two men separated, Mr. Starffe pondering on Freeland's changed manner concerning Helwyse, Freeland full of anxiety on his sweet mistress's behalf.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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